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ISSUE 228 ▪ APRIL 2023

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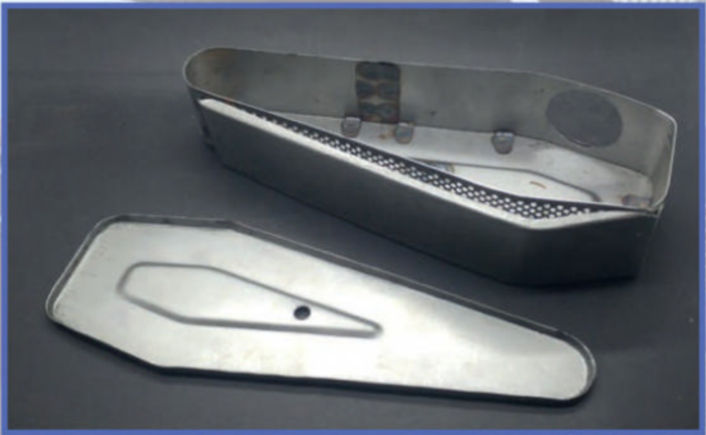

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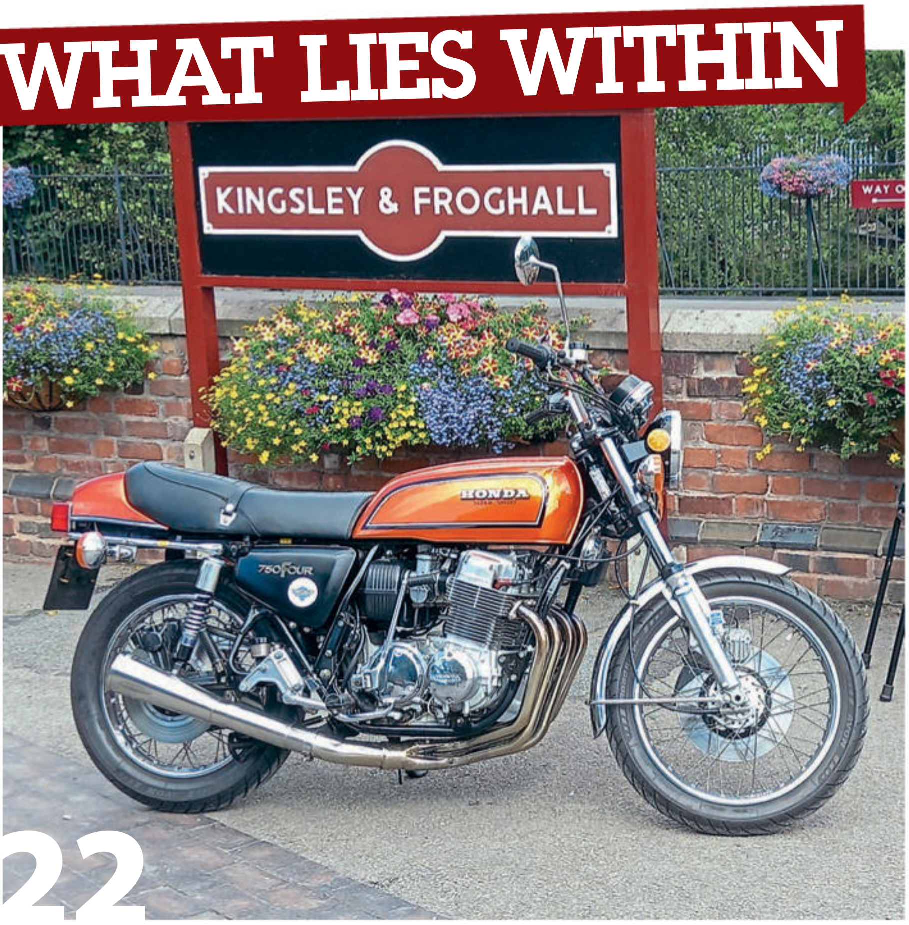
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HONDA CB750 ■ VINCENT HRD COMET ■ CONDOR!
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REALCLASSIC 228: PUBLISHED APRIL 2023

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WHO'S DONE WHAT

Mayday! Mayday! This issue of RealClassic magazine danced around a maypole while Frank Westworth and Rowena Hoseason of the Cosmic Bike Co Ltd waved white hankies and hit each other with sticks. Chris Abrams and the top team of art editors at AT Graphics (thanks for the assist last month, Lucy!) prepped all the page design, while Mortons Media Group Ltd handled advertising, subscriptions and back issues. Did we miss Easter already?

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THIS MONTH we've been reading **QUANTUM RADIO** by AG Riddle, which is somewhat silly alternate-worlds sci-fi; **BEFORE & AFTER** by Andrew Shanahan in which a morbidly obese recluse meets the zombie apocalypse; **THE LAST WISH** and **BLOOD OF ELVES** by Andrzej Sapkowski, which are the first of an excellent serious of fantasy novels starring The Witcher. Very good fun indeed!

MEANWHILE AT THE MOVIES we heartily recommend **THE LITTLE THINGS** with Denzel Washington who might/not have caught a serial killer; **THE MAN WHO KILLED HITLER AND THEN BIGFOOT** with Sam Elliott being simply brilliant; **THE LAST DUEL** by Ridley Scott; French medieval combat neatly bookending the director's career; **FREE GUY** with Ryan Reynolds which is just plain daft and a whole heap of fun. And no, Frank, you still can't watch **THRONE OF BLOOD** again…

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FROM THE FRONT

Somewhere in The Shed there was a fuel tank for a Norton Commando. I know this because I put it there. It's a big fat Interstate tank and was badly in need of a good coat of paint when I stored it carefully away. Snag was that I probably stored it carefully away over a decade ago, and although fuel tanks are large objects, I would have wrapped it in a plastic bin liner or two before parking it on a shelf along with other oddly-shaped items in bin liners.

Time for an expedition, then. Gloves, hat and face mask. You think I'm joking? As well as being a rusty rest home for sundry worn-out motorcycles, The Shed is also some kind of magnet for weary wasps. And solitary bees. And mice, although mice are less likely to come zooming out of a dark damp corner with a fully loaded sting at the ready. But then, bees and wasps tend not to use priceless, rare and easily corroded classic motorcycle spares as their own personal latrine.

As I've said before, digging through the piles of junk / priceless relics is always amusing, not least in the memory-scratching thing. I pulled out an ancient Cornwall County Council bin liner (those were the days, etc) which contained a fuel tank for a Commando Interpol, complete with the big hole for the radio. Why on earth is this here? I don't think I've ever owned a Commando Interpol, although I've had a few of the rotary Interpol 2 machines over the years. This tank does not fit those. Looks like a slimline Dominator tank apart from the big tunnel for the Commando's top frame tube.

A very early fibreglass tank for a Fastback? Sound as the proverbial shilling and unlinered, so ripe for … for what, exactly? I've never actually owned a Fastback, either.

Another big old sack clanked when I lifted it, and weighed rather a lot, so it plainly wasn't a fuel tank. Correct! It was a collection of three NOS brake discs for a Commando. They were new when they appeared, as I remember, although I have no idea why they appeared, but sadly the salt has got to them.

Actually, maybe they weren't new. Maybe they came off previous Commandos when I fitted bigger, better front brakes, which I did several times.

This memory stuff is quite absorbing, if only to me.

Finally I found the Interstate tank, snugly wrapped in two sturdy Cornwall County Council bin bags. It's… rusty. Not badly, mostly surface stuff, but it also boasts what appear to be a couple of filled dents. They sound… ah… sound. And all the threads are good, so it's definitely worth considering for a refurbishment. And why would I do that, given that the tank on my current Commando is sound, only occasionally dented and has (most of) its original paint?

The reason, insane though it sounds as I type it, is because I'm somehow reluctant to replace the tatty original finish on the bike's original tank, but at the same time I want it to look nice. Does this make any sense? With any luck at all, the climate will suddenly notice that it is now Spring and will therefore bloom into sunshine and light breezes, rather than the hurricane deluges we've had today. And that would mean that I can stop fretting about Shedstuff and just get out there and ride the thing!

As soon as the registration document arrives from the DVLA, that is. Hmmm. Maybe I have time for a total rebuild…

Ride safely

Frank Westworth
Frank@realclassic.net

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THE NEXT ISSUE

THE NEXT ISSUE (RC229) WILL BE PUBLISHED ON 5TH MAY AND SHOULD REACH UK SUBSCRIBERS BY 8TH MAY

THE Mystery BIKE

A little arcane Velocette history from Alan Cathcart, who uncovers a mystery and gets to ride a vintage-period cammy special…

Photos by Kel Edge

Arai
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Velocette

The USA can surely contain no more dedicated an Anglophile motorcyclist than my American mate Jeff Craig – a fellow bike freak whom I teamed up with to share a flat when he moved to London at the end of the Swinging 60s, Beatles era and all. Jeff toured Europe several times on a BMW R69S, German reliability and shaft final drive having won him over. He did validate that decision by getting a burnt valve on one cylinder replaced off their parts shelf by the Portuguese police motor workshop in downtown Lisbon, after being led there by a traffic cop aboard a similar bike, who was concerned by the amount of smoke pouring out of the British registered BMW's right exhaust! A former dirt oval flat-tracker back home in the USA, Jeff also road raced in the UK with Bemsee, and bought an unrestored Brough Superior SS100, on which he later covered several thousand miles, both in the UK and after he shipped it back home to Pennsylvania.

Even before that, Craig was an avid enthusiast of British motorcycle engineering, and of Nortons and Velocettes in particular. He now has an enviable collection of British bikes, housed in the picturesque setting of an 18th century house in the Cotswolds-like Bucks County scenery north of Philadelphia, all of which are regularly exercised either on local roads, or at rallies as far afield as Canada and Virginia.

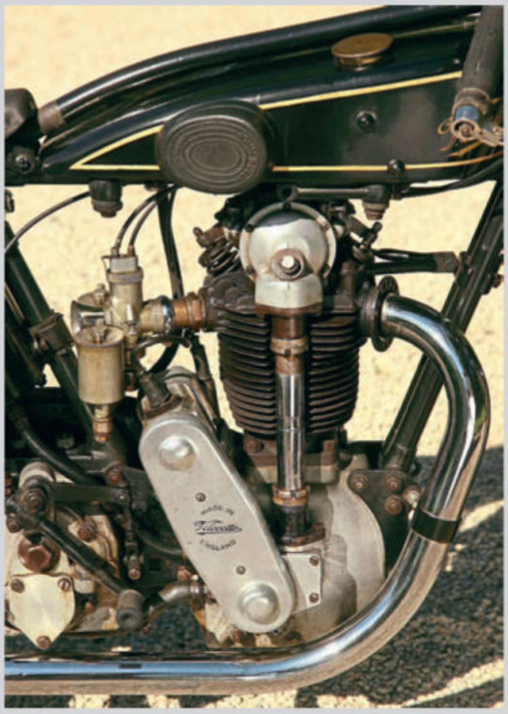
One component of the Craig collection is a mystery bike, whose origins still puzzle its owner 40 years after acquiring it. This is a vintage-period cammy Velocette special which he purchased in 1981 from an elderly American classic car enthusiast, who in turn had bought it in Britain 12 years earlier, in substantially the form it's still in today. The story of how Jeff Craig came to own the bike makes a good tale in itself.

'The phone rang one Sunday morning, and out of the blue I heard a voice asking if I'd be interested in buying a Mark 1 KSS Velocette,' he recalls. 'The owner told me he'd had three heart attacks, and couldn't start it any more, but he wanted it to go to a good home, and had heard I was interested in Velos. The asking price seemed very fair, so I agreed to go up to Long Island and take a look at it.'

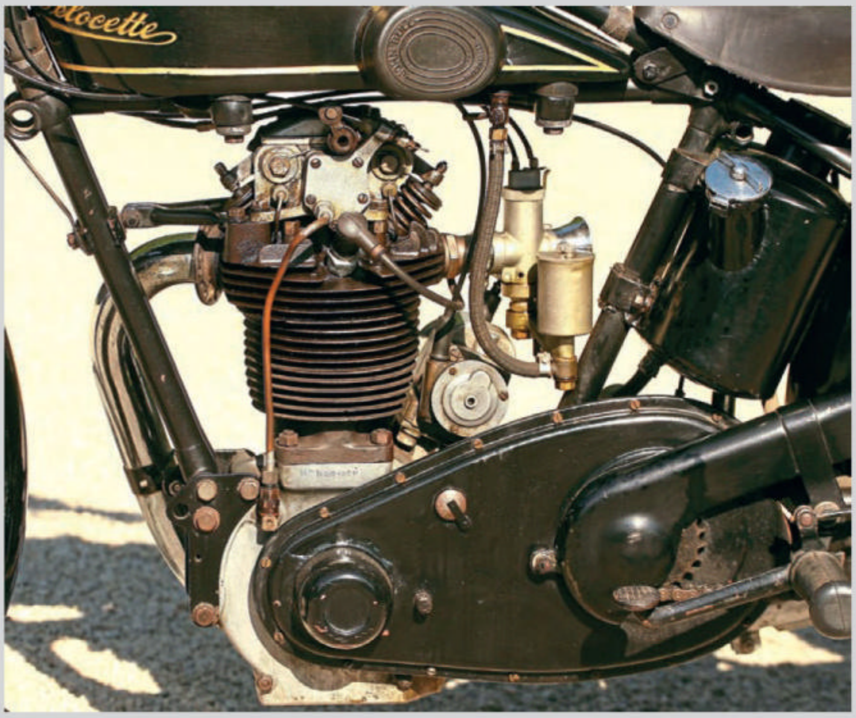
The voice at the end of the phone turned out to belong to aeronautical engineer Alec Ullman, a legendary figure in North American motor sport as the founder of the Sebring race track in Florida, and promoter of the first US Grand Prix Formula 1 race which was held there back in 1959. Ullman was the proprietor of a fine collection of vintage cars and motorcycles, housed in his country estate not far from Manhattan.

'He met us in the main square of a little Long Island town in the Type 40 Bugatti coupe he used as an everyday car!' says Craig. 'I felt I was stepping into dreamland when I saw that the one he used for special occasions was a Hispano-Suiza King Alfonso XII limousine, which even back then was a million-dollar motor car! Anyway, the Velocette looked fine and started first pop, so I wrote him a check, loaded it in the van, and drove home.'

Back at the ranch a closer look at the Velo revealed some detail discrepancies, starting with the frame. This was evidently a 1920s ➤



A classic single engine if there ever was



Velocette's ohc engines shared the unusual primary drive arrangement with their lesser singles vintage item, but the single overhead-cam KSS engine (standing for Kamshaft Super Sports, the 'K' denoting the Germanic origins of the Goodman – formerly Guttemann – family which owned Velocette) bearing number 4938, appeared to be a rather later item. Moreover, the front end comprised strutted Webb girder forks, which Velocette had only fitted to the KTT Mark 1 (Kamshaft Tourist Trophy) racers introduced in 1929, to replace the more flimsy Brampton girders used on its earlier production models.

The gearbox, too, seemed to be a racing component. Although a kickstart was fitted when Craig bought the bike, Ullman had acquired it with a blanked-off end-plate which Jeff refitted, and in so doing observed the magic letters 'TT' stamped on the mainshaft. And that big wrap-round oil tank, with its left-side filler, seemed surely to be a KTT racing component…

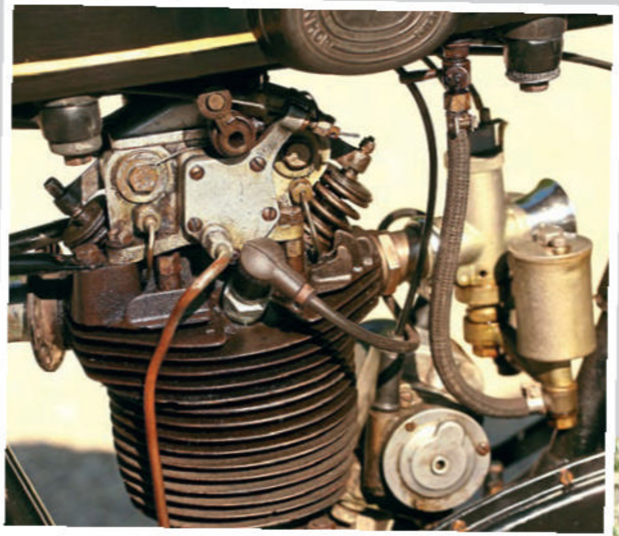
More surprises were in store when Craig first rode what he was increasingly certain was a period Velocette competition special. Ullman had told him the gearbox was a three-speeder, such as all KSS models of the pre-1930 vintage period indeed sported.

'I shifted into third, wound the throttle hard open and thought to myself, "Is this all there is?" recalls Jeff. 'Just for the hell of it I thought I'd try for another gear – and sure enough I found one, and the bike took off again, with me holding on for dear life!'

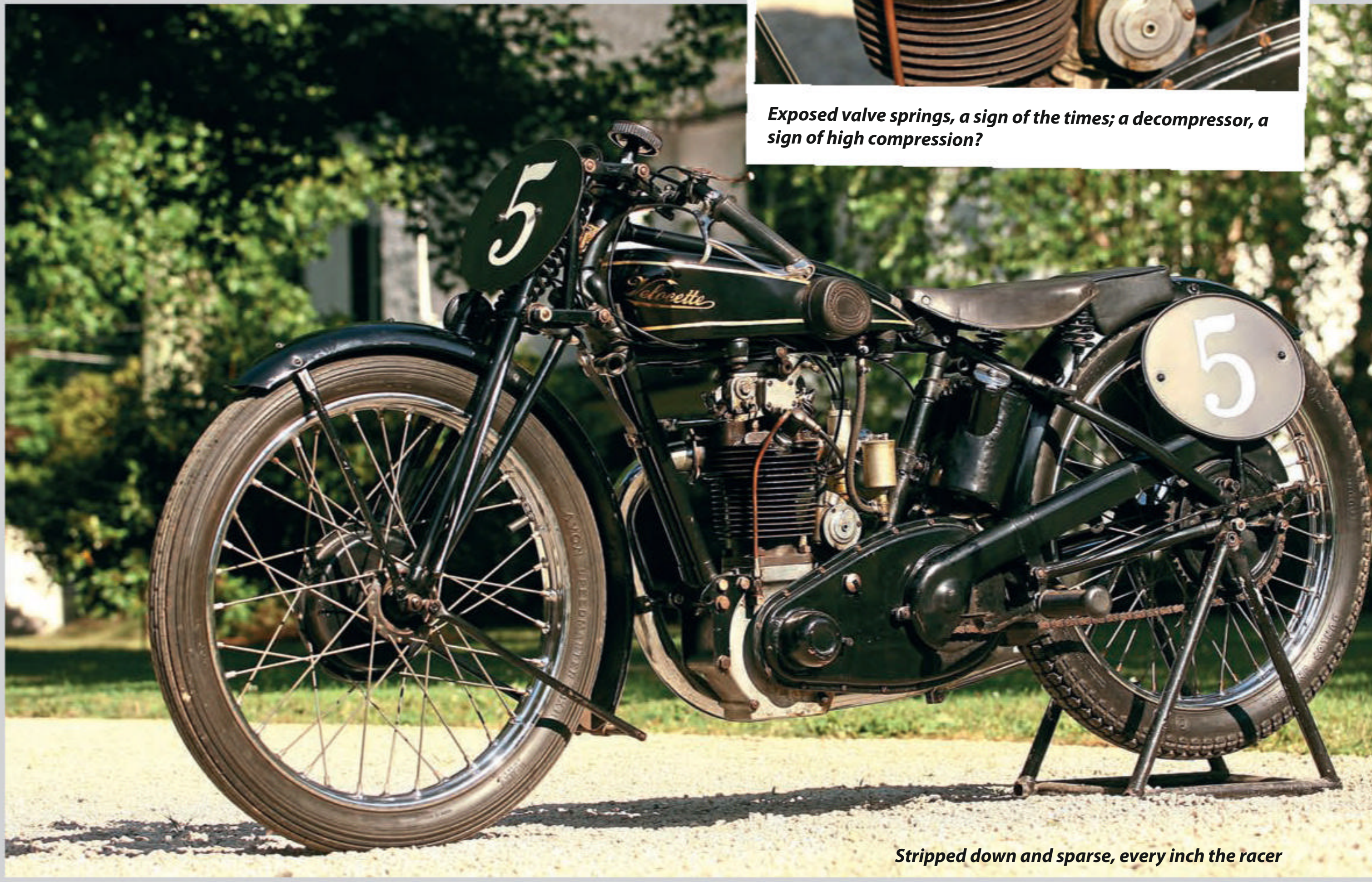
Like so many other Velo fellows around the world, Craig turned for assistance to that fount of knowledge of anything to do with the products of the British company's Hall Green factory, marque specialist Ivan Rhodes. Back came the reply by return airmail: he was indeed the owner of 'a delightful period special, with mainly KSS parts, and some KTT fittings'.

The engine, it turned out according to the factory records in Rhodes' possession, had come from a 1933 model KTS (Kamshaft Touring Sport) road bike, a street version of the KTT racer that had been delivered in February 1934 to a Mr. Bushell of Bolton, Lancashire, while frame no. 2940 is a 1929 component belonging to a KN model furnished in December of that year to a Mr. Poole of Wolverhampton. However, the marriage of the two appears to have been consummated at least by the mid-sixties, when, according to invoices obtained by Ullman when he bought the bike near Blackpool, Lancashire in 1969, a previous owner was one Mr. A. Mawdsley of Southport, who seems from all the bills to have spent quite a lot of money on various bits and pieces for it.

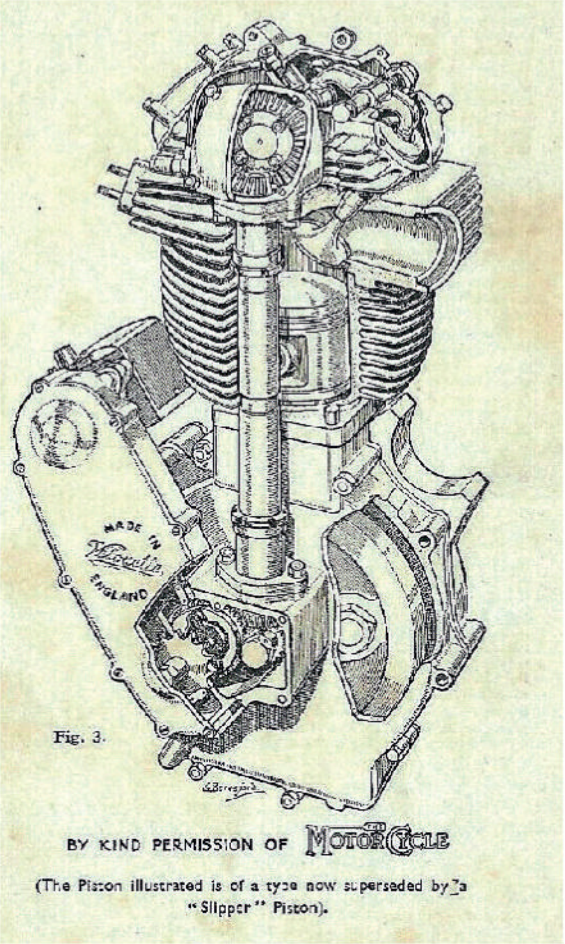
The Mark 1 KTT was the first in a long line of Velocette production racers descended from the company's first OHC machine, which debuted in the 1925 Isle of Man Junior TT. Previously best-known for their range of efficient but scarcely performance orientated two-stroke lightweights, Velocette's entry into the racing arena with a 74 x 81mm 348cc four-stroke (these dimensions were to be retained for all future KTT variations) caused some surprise, though the subsequent retirement of all three machines entered did not.



Exposed valve springs, a sign of the times; a decompressor, a sign of high compression?



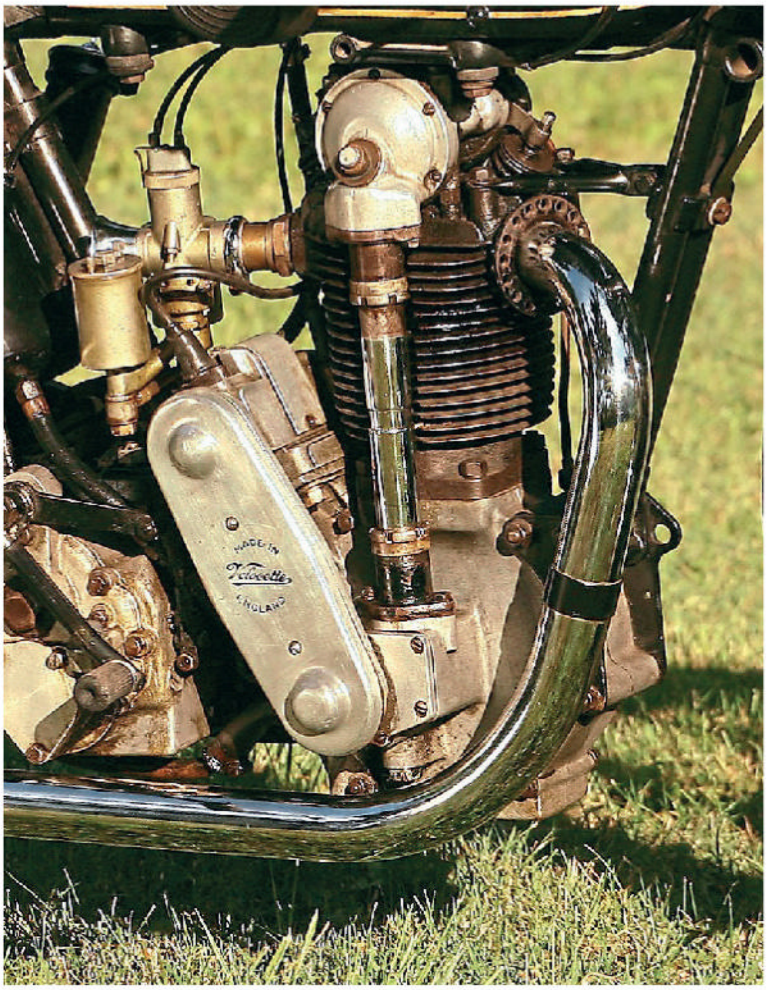
Stripped down and sparse, every inch the racer



BY KIND PERMISSION OF MOTOR CYCLE

(The Piston illustrated is of a type now superseded by a "Slipper" Piston).

How it works…



Velocette obviously profited from the experience, for the following year its works team returned, to register the first-ever TT victory for an overhead-camshaft machine when Alec Bennett won the 350cc Junior TT at record speed on his factory entry. He repeated his victory in 1928, with teammate Freddie Hicks the winner in '29, to complete a hat trick of Velocette TT wins. In the meantime, Velocette rider Frank Longman had won the 1927 French 350 GP, to score the firm's first of many victories outside Britain.

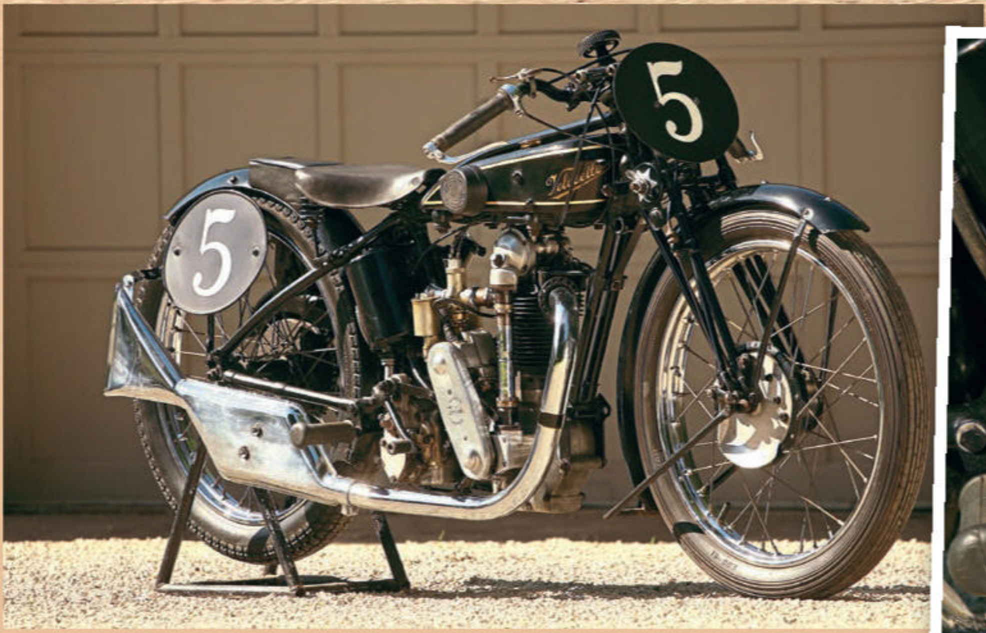
This success encouraged the Goodman family which owned Veloce Ltd, makers of the Velocette, to produce the first genuine production racing motorcycle (as opposed to a tuned roadster) to be offered for sale to the general public. The Mark 1 KTT, which appeared in 1929, was in every way a customer version of the company's TT-winning works racers, and during the 1930s the KTT was gradually updated and refined, scoring literally hundreds of race wins all over the world in the hands of its satisfied customers.

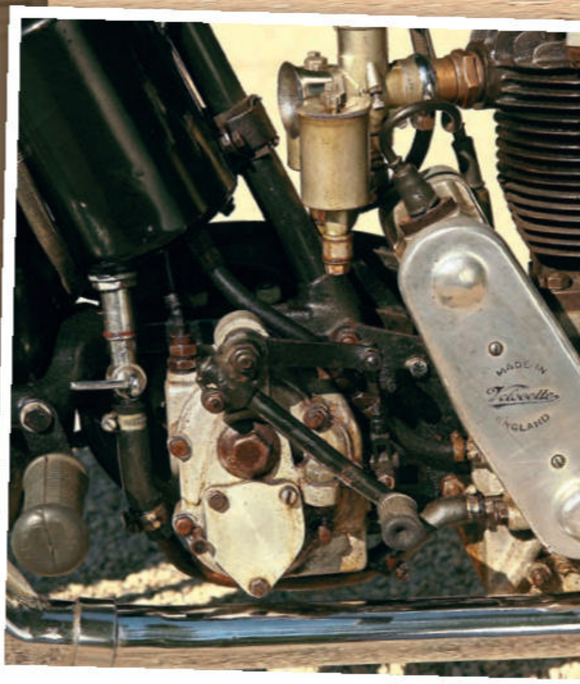
Thanks to the capacity for original thought of chief engineer and ex-racer Harold Willis (a man also endowed with an endearing turn of phrase, who gave the world the 'double-knocker' epithet for twin overhead camshafts!), Velocette was in the vanguard of technical development in the pre-war era, being the first to fit the positive-stop foot gearchange soon to be universally adopted, among the first to use what was then quaintly termed a 'sprung frame' (with rear suspension), and again one of the first to use coil valve springs and to enclose them, which greatly added to the clean look of their engines – both before being ridden, and after.

The Velocette KSS was the road version of the KTT, and the KN model was effectively an improved KSS with a larger Hoffman 13-roller big-end and a conrod suitably modified to accept the larger big-end outer ring – a modification also adopted on the early KTT Mark 1 racers. But the fully-brazed tubular-steel cradle KN frame on Craig's bike is fitted with one of the last flat petrol tanks made by Velocette before they moved to the saddle tank from 1930 onwards, as well as that KTT racing-style oil tank. 3.00 x 21in tyres are fitted front and rear just as on the KSS models of the period, but the strutted Webb forks, extremely stiff and rigid but almost impossible to repair once damaged (which accounts for their rarity today), are certainly a KTT racing component. The somewhat diminutive 7-inch single leading-shoe front brake, with its water deflector on the underside, is a KTS part, while the rod-operated 8-inch rear drum was used on several different Velocette models.

The engine of Craig's Velocette special is an unmodified KSS unit with drive to the single overhead cam effected via a vertical shaft and bevel gears, with the valves running in bronze-alloy guides and fitted with coil springs. Phosphor-bronze bushes are employed for the one-piece rockers mounted on eccentric spindles, and if Jeff Craig ever eventually gets round to taking a look inside, he expects he may find some tuning work, for a competition BTH magneto and a period racing 1 3/16in Amal carburettor are fitted.

And then there's that gearbox: four-speed transmissions were adopted for the KSS range in 1933, so it's possible that this could have belonged to the engine for all their respective lives. The box is fitted with the positive-stop mechanism for the foot gearchange invented ➤





Even the gearbox is a minor mystery. Although nominally a 3-speed device, in fact it has four gears, and the magic letters 'TT' suggest that it originated in a KTT racing machine

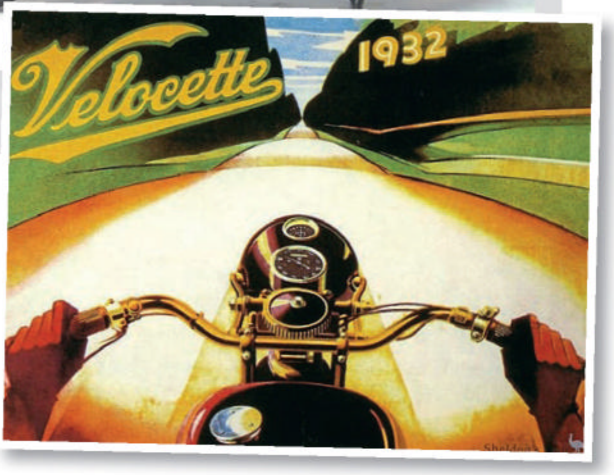
by Velocette's creative designer Harold Willis, a feature which first appeared on the KTT customer racing model which debuted in Mark 1 form in 1929. What appears to be an oil bath primary case is in fact simply an enclosure for the dry clutch and chain primary drive.

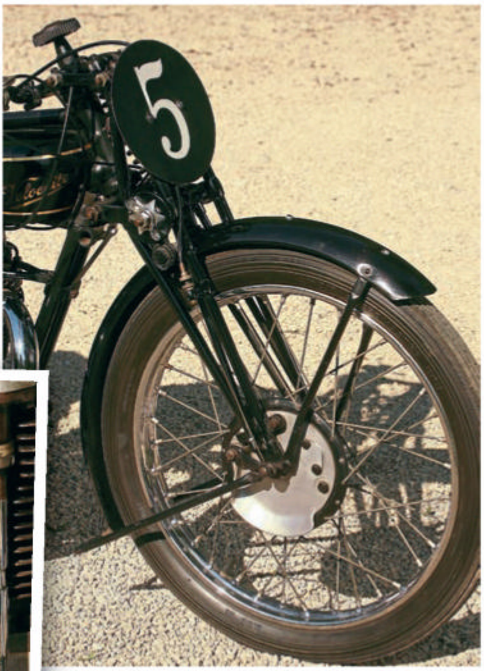
Firing up the Craig Velo in the time-honoured run-and-bump manner for an enjoyable spin around the quiet lanes of Pennsylvania's Nockamixon State Park on a warm summer day, requires only a touch of choke, and about half the available ignition retard. There's a fair degree of vibration as the engine climbs towards peak revs of about 6000rpm in top, which is good for just over 80mph according to the speedo of the Craig family's following Morgan Plus Four – there are no instruments fitted to the bike.

The down-for-first right-foot gearchange works beautifully by period standards. A big improvement on a hand shifter, this was the first production attempt at delivering that – although in the lower three gears there's an occasional snatch under acceleration, which possibly implies worn engaging dogs. But once it's singing along in top gear, with

ALL CHANGE FOR THE 1930S

1929 was the last year of the flat tank, with Veloce moving to a more modern appearance for 1930, as seen here. This 1930 KSS boasts full road equipment





The strutted Webb forks are certainly a KTT racing component. The 7-inch single leading-shoe front brake, with its water deflector on the underside, is a KTS part, and fairly useless

a healthy crack coming from that lovely Brooklands can, this is a bike which perfectly captures the essence of sporting vintage motorcycling.

The steeply dropped bars, clad with well-used Velocette rubbers, permit a purposeful stance, allowing you to really get down to it, if you want to. If you do, get ready to sit up in good time so you can swiftly stamp on the rear brake foot pedal to slow from any kind of speed. The front brake is pretty useless, leaving its rear counterpart to do all the hard work of stopping a bike weighing 260lb with oil, but no fuel.

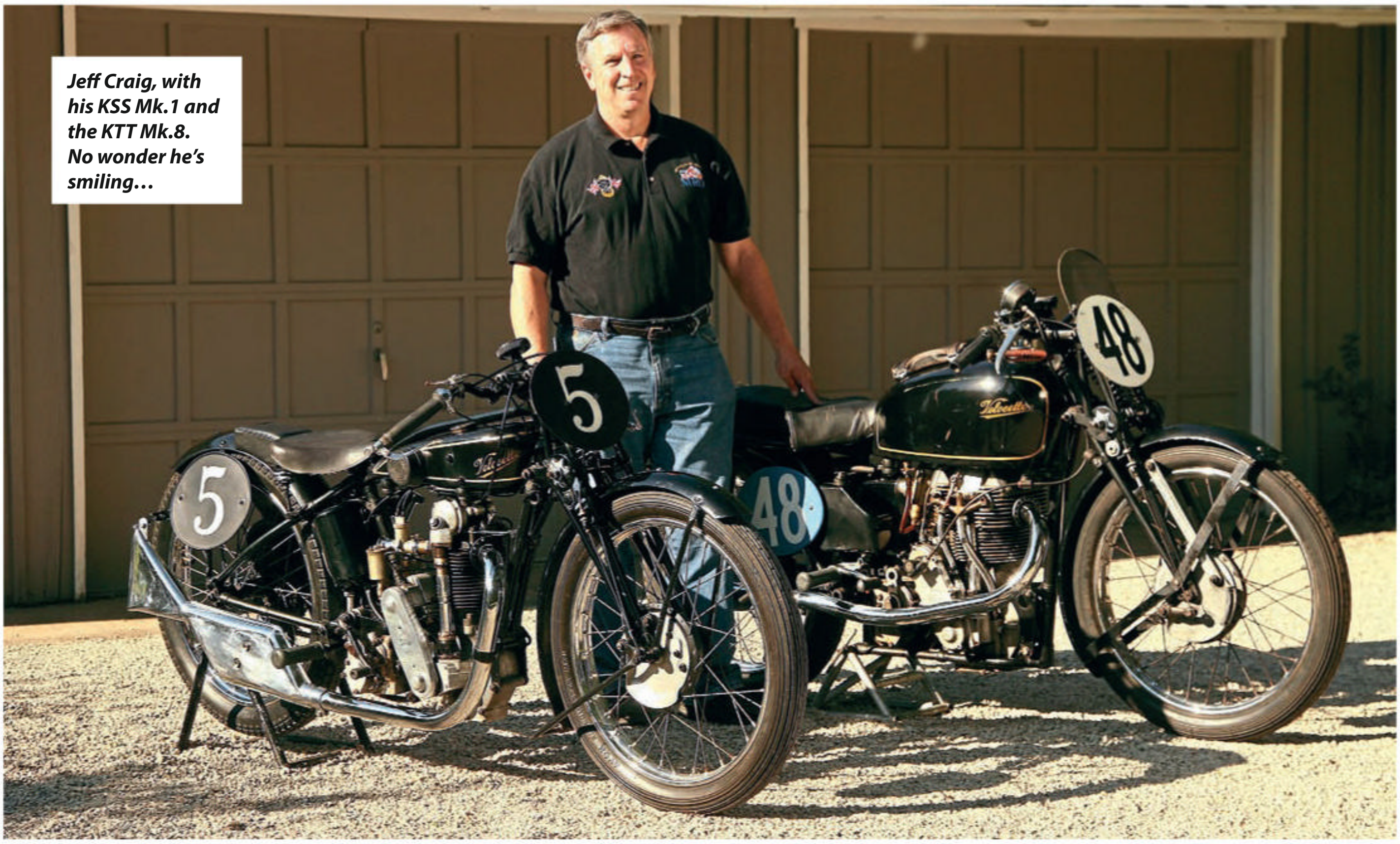
Surprisingly, perhaps, I found the handling of the twin-downtube open-cradle frame to be excellent, even over the occasional bump to be found on America's mostly billiard table roads, and while quite slow, the steering delivered via the 21-inch front wheel is pretty light as well as stable. But I was glad of the large André steering damper when, cresting a rise at fairly high speed, the front end got very light and the wheel began to flap about.

A touch more damper soon cured that, but such incidents were an indication of the surprising degree of poke available from the vintage 350cc engine, which did however show its age by the amount of oil flung about externally in spite of the coil springs, presumably exiting via the valve guides. This was apparently an occupational hazard back then of owning a cammy Velo with exposed valve springs, which liberal applications of asbestos string only partially cured.

It seems probable that Jeff Craig's Velocette KSS Mark 1 special may have been built as a rule-beater for Vintage racing in Britain in

➤

Traces of races past…



Jeff Craig, with his KSS Mk.1 and the KTT Mk.8. No wonder he's smiling…

the late 1950s or early '60s, using the best eligible period Velo components, very much along the lines of the Brooklands machines ridden by factory ace Freddie Hicks, but with a foot gearchange. As such, it makes a perfect bookend to the other Velocette in Jeff's collection, a completely original and unrestored 1948 KTT Mark VIII, whose history from new is documented ever since it was delivered that year to the company's Philadelphia dealer, and later raced in the northeast USA. But although Jeff Craig would obviously prefer to know more about the origins of his mystery bike, like other true motorcycle enthusiasts his only concern meanwhile is the enjoyment he gets from riding it. Me too! RC

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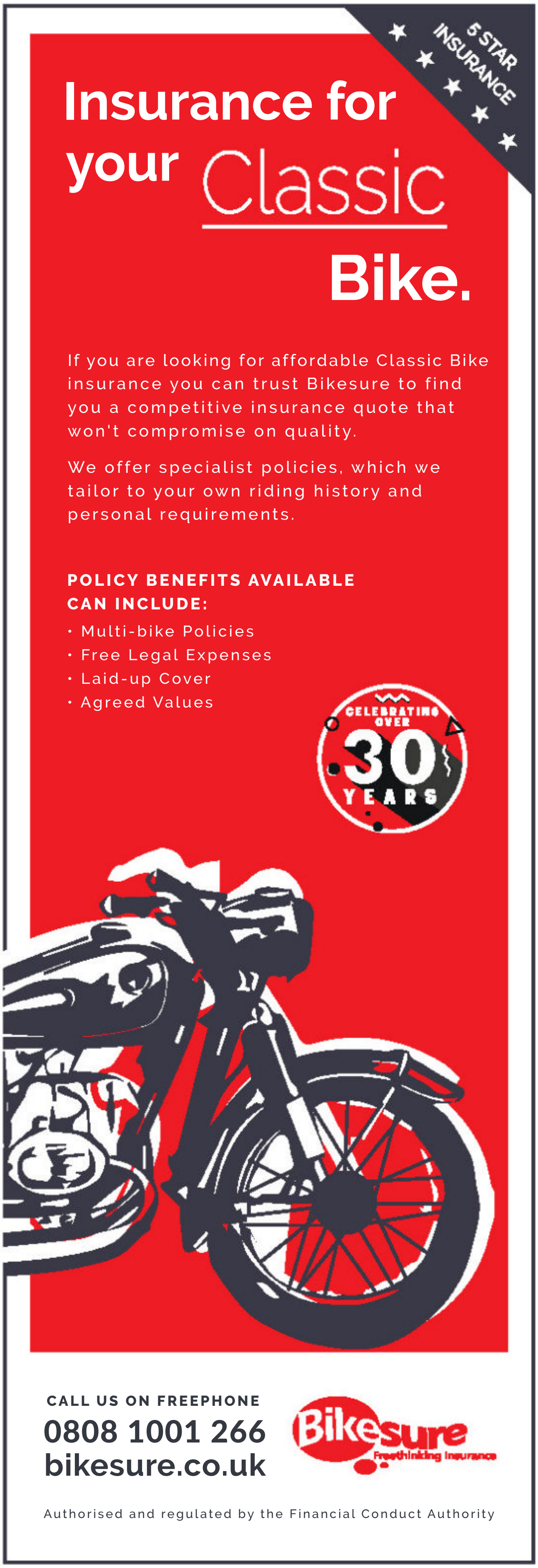

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RC readers write, rant and rattle on…

Summat to say? Send your comments, hints, tips, tales of woe and derring-don't to: RCHQ@RealClassic.net

FUEL FORETHOUGHT

I've read lots of articles about ethanol over the years, most of them utter hysterical rubbish. Rowena Hoseason's article in this month's subscriber newsletter was possibly the most informed, balanced and realistic I've come across. I have carburettor and fuel injection bikes and Rowena's comments chime exactly with my experience. I use a stabiliser plus E5 for 16 weeks over winter. I drain the carburettor float bowls and I run a dehumidifier. Just a cheap domestic one. I believe this controls the humidity in the atmosphere and therefore the moisture that is available to the fuel to be absorbed into the fuel system.

Even with these measures my Hinckley T100 fuel-injected Bonneville runs a bit rough until it gets a tank of completely new fuel. Without these measures I have had E5 'go off' in 12 weeks.

Edward Foreman, member

The answer may appear on page 21 of last month's magazine. Yes, a Fuel Diamond. I have no connection with this company apart from being a satisfied customer. I have now used one of these (not the same one, obvs) in two cars and two bikes. In a total of about 60,000 miles they've had no fuel related problems whatsoever. I have no idea how the Fuel Diamonds work or what they do, but I swear by them. I'm a great believer in magic pills and potions (WD40, for example, clearly has supernatural powers), so anything that can be used without spanners or specialist knowledge is fine by me.

Incidentally, the Esso petrol that Rowena mentions is absolute rocket fuel. The difference in performance is quite noticeable. It is expensive and not always available, but worth looking out for.

Jim Peace, member 1262

The paragraph about vaporisation in fuel pipes caught my attention; 'The FBHVC suggest routing fuel lines away from heat sources and shielding carbs from the engine's warmth – not too tricky with a classic car but not so straightforward on an old bike.'

My three AMC bikes (1952 AJS 18S; 1953 AJS 18S combo, 1959 Matchless G12) all have original Paxolin insulation blocks between the cylinder heads and the Amal carbs, so I assume heat-soak to the carb was a problem as far back as the early 1950s. I also run a 1952 MG saloon car which suffered badly from the carb getting too hot in traffic jams on hot days, being a pig to re-start when it stalled. The fuel was vaporising in the fuel feed pipe from the pump to the float chamber which ran OVER the exhaust manifold. The poor little SU pump just ticked away trying to move vapour. The carb bolted directly to the manifold.

The cure, of course, is to re-route the fuel pipe well away from the exhaust and to fit a DIY heatshield as well as a vital insulation block between the carb and manifold. How to re-start an old MG when it gets vaporisation in the carb / fuel lines? Pour cold water over the carb, it condenses the fuel… but might crack the manifold!

Neil Cairns, member 2501

In the interest of even-handed reporting, I should mention that several RC regulars responded by saying that they use any old petrol, pay no attention to it whatsoever, and never suffer any issues with poor starting or running. They must lead blessed lives – or possibly their local petrol stations sell the good stuff! ***Rowena***

BP super
CGT 243B

YOU PROMISED TO BE KIND

Sir, I beg to differ. Your highly bigoted and distorted piece in RC227 on BSA / Triumph's delightful 250cc scooter offering disappoints. While the photos capture my better half's 'Wow! That's beautiful' sentiment and the technical and marketing content is most welcome, the riding experience is poorly represented.

My own BSA Sunbeam was a joy to ride. Its quirky, whirring motor, light gearbox and more-than-adequate suspension were good enough to take me to BSA club camping weekends 100-plus miles from home. Ideal for Cornish roads I imagine.

Well done for owning your intolerance. May I suggest you strap it to the sturdy rear rack, place any excess in a bag hung on the thoughtful 'handbag hook' (secure with aerolastic if need be), put on your pumps, and give it another go.

Maybe leave the dog at home?

Tim Bower

I'm guessing from the photo that your encounter with the Sunbeam (and canine) was a little while ago. Maybe several decades? During the single summer that I rode a Honda CG125, I travelled from south-east London all the way to the Donington Monsters of Rock festival, together with my best boy (hello Teebin, where are you now?) on a CB125 (overhead cam!) and another chum on a C90. With L-plates we could only travel on minor roads around London's sprawl and a simple trip turned into an epic expedition.

The oil dipstick on my CG melted; the CB developed an alarming top end rattle, and the C90 was utterly indomitable. To an inexperienced 17 year-old on open roads in the mid-1980s all three machines were amazing. Would I want to ride any of them on today's roads in today's traffic? Not if you paid me… ***Rowena***

SERVICE STARS

We have for many years insured our m old clunkers and modern motorcycles with Lynbrook, so greeted the news that they'd merged with Kingfisher Insurance with a tiny bit of trepidation. Turns out we need not have worried. When the moment came to insure Frank's 'foreign' Norton Commando, they came up with a competitive price within 12 hours of being contacted, and sent a cover note rapido so the process of getting the machine registered wasn't slowed down at all. Thanks, folks!

It's also reassuring to know that they're happy dealing with riders aged 21 to 79 – or older for existing clients. Worth bearing that in mind for the future…

Rowena Hoseason, member 002

I am reaching the end of the restoration of a Velocette Viceroy and ordered stainless nuts and bolts from Acme Stainless. I then realised I had missed one item, a 5/16" by 1/2" BSF bolt. On being asked if it could be added to the order they said yes if it had not been sent – and not to worry as they would send one at no cost.

Excellent quality goods and an easy and pleasant company to deal with. I can't recommend them strongly enough.

Peter Occleston, member 6783

DOMMI DELIGHT

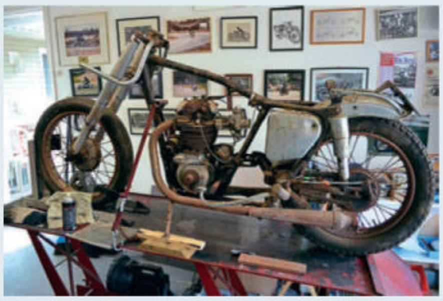
To my great joy there was an article on the Norton Dominator Model 7 in RC226. More years ago than I care to remember, a friend allowed me to ride his Model 7. After my first two motorcycles – a 1939 Matchless-engined OK Supreme followed by a 1936 HRD Meteor (wish I still had it) – the Model 7 was a revelation.

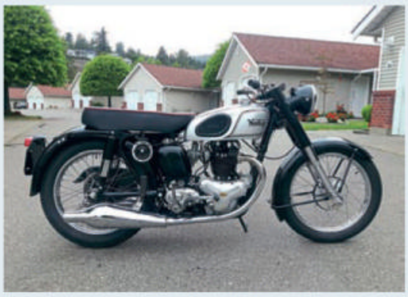
Some time ago a friend 'gifted' me a Model 7 for restoration. I have taken on some projects in my time but this one was a challenge. The engine came with a 10TT9 carb: makes you wonder. The motor was seized at the top end of the stroke which made for an interesting teardown. After many months of toil I think the final results were pleasing.

I enjoyed Robert Finan's experiences with his own Model 7.

Tony Cording

Brilliant job with the Norton, Tony. Respect! One of my favourite Norton twins, although I've never seen one with a TT carb fitted. ***Frank W***





HARD TORQUE?

Here is a way around using the adjustable and non-adjustable crow's feet spanners. Make sure they are attached to the torque wrench at 90° to the handle of the torque wrench. That way no calculations for the extra length need be done. It's a tip I learned from 'Pacific Mike' on You Tube, mostly on working on Harleys.

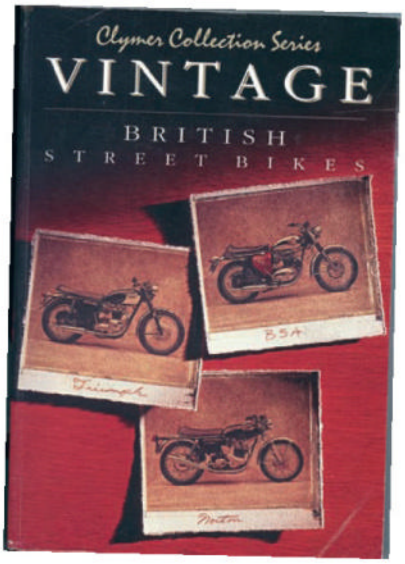
Derek Reynolds, member 10,279

In the letters in RC227 a reader describes a physiological measure of 'two white knuckles' as an undesirable alternative to a torque wrench. I have what might well be a more accurate measure, learned from a friend who ran a two-man country garage. He worked on all types and makes of vehicles from Austin Sevens to double decker buses. I asked him if he had a torque wrench. He didn't. Over the years he said he only needed two torque settings: one fart tight and two fart tight.

Peter Occleston, member 6783

The world is filled with wonder… ***Frank W***

COMMANDO CHAT



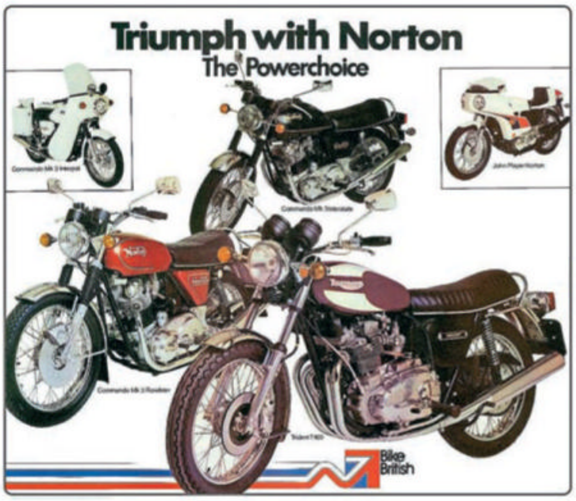
I'm enjoying Frank's adventures with the Commando. A little titbit about the Clymer manual: back in 1975 I was chatting with an old friend who was an editor at Clymer and I wondered why they were still using artists doing line drawings. I told him to bring a camera and notepad and I would strip and lay out a Mk3 for him to photograph. The manual turned out a success so well that after Norton-Villiers in the US folded I did all the teardown on other brands, holding little parts under very hot lamps for another eight years.

When the first carton of manuals arrived from the printer, all nicely shrink wrapped in plastic, I was horrified to see a big blob of oil under the glamour shot on the cover. This was contrived to wind me up: I still have the copy.

When we got the first Mk3 for magazine tests it would not keep running. Hit the magic button and it would start – then stop. Eventually we saw that the new-fangled kill switch was in the 'off' position, so when you took your thumb off the button the ignition turned off! Lucas!

Later, at British Marketing (a Norton store in California) I sold a Boyer ignition and a single Mikuni kit that transforms the bike. Problem was, we never got to see a bike again for a tune-up. A friend is still riding his bike with these parts he purchased from me in 1977! I used to order the 34mm carbs jetted to my specs. I have one on a 1973 850 now. They are really a good fitment. Sod the purists, light twistgrip pull, 50-plus mpg and beautifully made.

Brian Slark, member



Great story about the oil leak! And your manual is still providing great service, too. ***Frank W***

Reading Frank's intro to RC227, it kind of miffed me that he encountered such negativity from non-T160 and non-Commando owners about each other's bikes. From 1979 to 1987 I was the proud owner of both a T160, which I still have, and a Mk3 Commando. I loved them both because they were so different. Both came with faults and I dealt with them (where I could) or lived with them.

While the T160 made a lovely sound, it was not the most comfy bike once you'd done over 100 miles. My younger bum put up with that and my now considerably older bum has the luxury of a remodelled seat, so longer distances are no longer an ordeal. The Commando had the huge Interstate tank and a nice wide and comfortable seat from the start. It was a great mile-eater, from which my body never had to recover from aches and pains after travelling. OK, certain bits came loose or fell off, but I was a customer of the great Mick Hemmings. He advised me and rectified some of the very few 'issues' that my Norton suffered.

They say one shouldn't have any regrets in life and to be honest I don't… but I still miss that bike and its arm-stretching acceleration. It could see off 99% of all contemporary two-wheeled and four-wheeled transport from a standing start. In 2009 I found myself with a wad of redundancy cash burning a hole on my wallet. You know what I should have bought.

But no, I went and bought a 1972 Mk2 Rocket 3 in need of a little TLC. A cracking machine but if I sold it, I could afford a Commando…

You can imagine how I felt (read that as 'drooled') when I saw your recent purchase. You have yourself a great time on that bike, and I look forward to reading about your exploits.

Pete Palecek, member 5678

For quite a while I ran a T160 Trident alongside a Mk3 Commando. Each of them had their unique charms, although the Trident had a far greater demand for expenditure – it could munch through money far faster than it could munch the miles. And yes, it had a truly uncomfortable seat. But I loved it, in its own way, even though a reader once sent me a photo of myself standing up on the rests on the M5. It really did hurt!

But. I do prefer the Norton. ***Frank W***

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TALKING TRIPLES

I noticed in RC226 that there were a couple of mentions of the T180 Thunderbird Three, and if you take time to read Peter Henshaw's excellent book 'Triumph Trident and BSA Rocket 3' you will find the Thunderbird Three actually became the T160 Trident and the T180 was a later development. The Thunderbird Three was originally meant to be 830cc and the T180 870cc.

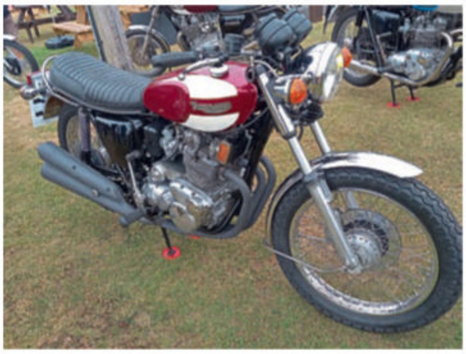
I got to see a T180 last year at Beezumph. The TR3OC have put together an excellent representation using a genuine prototype engine. Confusingly it carries the stacked silencer of the aborted Thunderbird Three, as seen here.

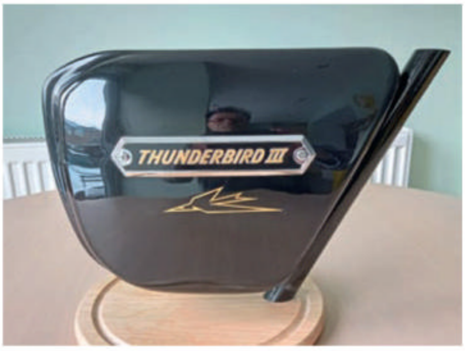
As you probably can tell I am obsessed with the Thunderbird Three, have been ever since seeing a picture of it in Bert Hopwood's book. It carries a lot more of Craig Vetter's influences than the T160 which was eventually launched, particularly the raised tail light and grab rail. I don't know if it is still there but a prototype used to sit in the window of TMS in Nottingham, although the grab rail is partially obscured by an aftermarket luggage rack. Note this one also has modified engine cases for chain driven camshafts.

They did print lots of Thunderbird Three nameplate stickers before deciding the name may have problems (Gerry Anderson's Thunderbirds or Ford?) and I did acquire some. As I currently don't have a Trident to rename I couldn't let them go to waste and instead made this rather expensive ornament for display. As I said I am obsessed!

In Odgie's article of the previous month there was a photo of BSA single expert Roger Taylor stood with an unusual frame, it looked like a Victor GP frame to me but was evidently for road racing with clip-on bars and a tail loop that was bent upward as if for a tail fairing. What was it? Something to do with Mead and Tomkinson's racers? Odgie makes some superb parts, his modified engine case in the same article was superb!

Andrew Walker, member 384





DOUBT ABOUT DOWTY

Here I am once again, writing to chastise Frank on a point of order. In RC225 he discussed the Dowty seal and describes it as a hollow washer formed into a U-section into which is fitted a fuel-proof rubber insert. Alas, this is not a Dowty seal but is a petrol tap seal. A Dowty seal is a precision engineered metal washer with an accurate rubber seal bonded to it and is used for the sealing of high pressure hydraulic systems, etc. In my engineering life in nuclear submarines I must have used thousands of them over 37 years in the service!

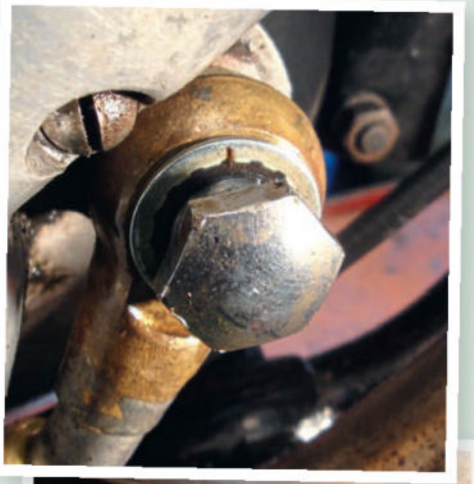
There is a wide range of both washer material as well as rubber grade and they can all be supplied in Imperial, German metric or French metric sizes – who knew?

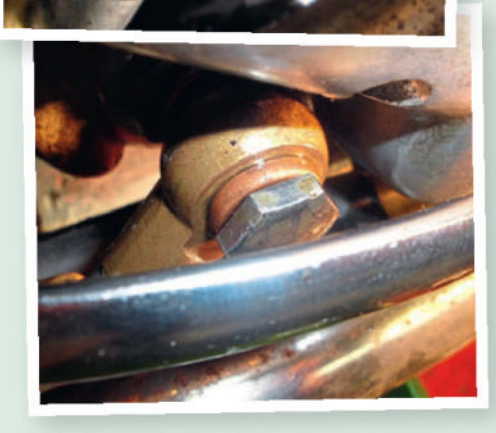
The trouble with being a journalist like Frank is that there is always someone out there willing to correct your statements and to attempt to prove you wrong, for which I apologise. However in this instance I think it is worthwhile to make the correction to prevent loyal readers going off on a wild goose chase after the wrong component.

Personally I love copper petrol seal taps as there is so much 'crush' available on the seal that you can get your petrol tap exactly oriented for the position of the tap lever, all without fiddling around with multiple thicknesses of red fibre washers.

Bill Hanna, member 162

It's always a pleasure to hear from you, Bill. Always. And thank-you for the petrol seal you included with your letter! There should be a pic nearby of it being put to good use (along with another behind the banjo) on a Matchless oil pipe union. There should also be a shot of the other union, where I've used what should be Dowty washers. Let's see which cures the seep! Hopefully, both will do that… ***Frank W***





THE SPARK OF WISDOM

Most of my experience with English bikes has been with models made in the late 1960s and early 70s. I recently acquired a 1959 BSA fitted with a magneto and dynamo. Many articles allude to the unreliability of these parts. Would RealClassic consider running an in-depth article addressing the myths, facts and upgrades to these older systems? I would sure benefit from guidance as I go through the bike and try to make it reliable.

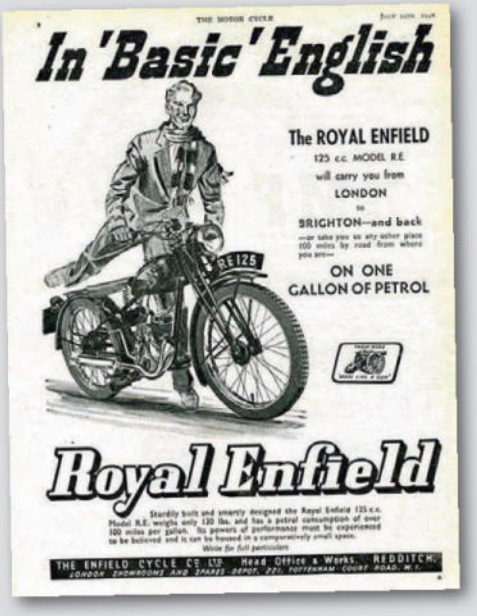
Mark McKeon

I fear that you have asked an almost unanswerable question.

My view is that most of the reputation for unreliability where magneto and dynamo electrics are concerned stems from their being poorly maintained and very old. A well-rebuilt magneto or dynamo should last for many years – probably the actual best advice is to find someone to do the rebuild whose work is recommended by others and guaranteed. Marque clubs and the VMCC are good starting points. I can personally recommend modern solid state regulators to replace the old electrical / mechanical voltage control units which accompanied most dynamos – I've fitted several and they've all worked well. Likewise, many folk recommend modern regulator / rectifier units to work with alternators.

The snag we'd have with a feature about this would be that lots of riders have different views, and most of us – like me – can speak only from personal experience. So, I prefer to stick to an original system where I can – with the exception of modern voltage control units for dynamos, as I've said. I've bought most of the bits to replace the magneto on my Matchless CSR with a solid state system, but it starts and runs (mostly) reliably with the magneto (rebuilt by a friend who is an actual engineer) so why bother? Lots of my friends disagree and update everything on their bikes, including redesigning the entire wiring system! It is a huge can of worms, to be honest.

Good luck with the A10 – really good bikes! ***FrankW***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BITTEN!

I just had to say how nice it was to see PUB's Flying Flea. It reminded me of my dad's one that sat at the back of the shed of our council house when I was a youngster. I well remember dad dragging it out from time to time and starting it up in the back yard, producing a decent smokescreen. He joined the army in 1943 and left in 1948 and the Flea dated from around then. I remember the hand-change on the tank and the canvas grips. I recall that it was grey but might have been green. Sometime in the 1970s mum sold it and a spare engine in a crate to the scrapman for a fiver!

Michael Durrant, member

SPEEDWAY STAR?

I think I can see the real reason why the left footrest on Frank's new Commando was not connected to the bike when it arrived. If you look at the picture on page 93 captioned 'Everything looks spot-on', you can plainly see that the Norton has speedway handlebars! It was probably stored in the shed at Harringay stadium for 40 years.

Keep up the good work; always an enjoyable read.

Edwin Webb, member

A speedway Commando? Sounds like fun! ***Frank W***

Norton
850
COMMANDO
ELECTRIC START

BETTER BRAKES

Frank writes about the brakes on the A65 Firebird he tried in RC225, as fitted to many BSA and Triumph bikes in 7" and 8" sizes. While these brakes are very powerful they have a quirk – or possibly a design fault. The operating cams are snail cams which give huge stopping power but no feel. I rode a T100 with the 8" brake and several BSA Fleetstars (a detuned Starfire) as company bikes when I was a courier. I threw my T100 and a firm's bike up the road as the brakes were very difficult to use in the wet.

I was complaining about this one evening in the Saltbox, a bikers' café in Biggin Hill. One of the guys who was production racing at the time said he could cure it for me. He built up the cams with weld and ground them to normal brake cam shape. The result was the best front brake on any bike, until equalled by double discs on my BM. That brake is still in my latest T100. Thanks Paul if you read this, it was the best 10 bob I ever spent.

Peter Greig, member 9133

Any chance of a photo or two of the cams or the insides of your brake, Peter? That would be very interesting! ***Frank W***

CLASSIC CREDENTIALS (AGAIN)

I try not to get hot under the collar, it doesn't do my stress levels any good, but I feel Frank Ackermann's letter in RC227 needs to be addressed. I agree with him that the new Commando is not my cup of tea, but then neither is a Fireblade or a Hayabusa. However there are died-in-the-wool Norton enthusiasts who I am sure love the look of the new bike and might even put their cash down despite the hefty price tag.

The fact that FrankA considers this bike to be useless for 'touring, bimbling or general riding' surely misses the point. It is designed to give the potential owner fun by whatever means are possible. If I had one I would have no hesitation in blasting safely along major roads and would take it to Mallory Park for a track blast at the Festival of 1000 Bikes.

Mr A then knocks late classic Japanese and European bikes, including the much underrated Honda XBR. That's exactly the era of bike sought by guys and girls of a certain age who now have a bit of spare cash to indulge their early memories. To suggest these individuals consider a Bantam, a B31 or a Dominator 88 is quite frankly a joke.

Then Mr A decides to knock modern bikes such as the Guzzi Stone and Honda NC750, suggesting that either bike could easily be replaced by a Panther M100 or a Münch Mammoth. Sorry, but what world are we living in for such comparisons to be made?

I have recently changed from an NC750X to a modern Honda CB500X. I have a set of Hepco & Becker panniers fitted, a one-way ferry booked in June from Portsmouth to Santander and, with my wife on pillion, we plan to spend several weeks touring Spain and Portugal. I wouldn't even consider doing that trip on an old Dominator or Bonneville without a support back-up vehicle full of spares and probably a replacement bike.

The point I am trying to make is that the biking community of which we are a part is so diverse that I find it a bit insulting to suggest that an old clunker is 'better' than more recent machines from other countries. 'Everyone to their own' is my view. If you want to tour Spain on a B31 then great, but please don't suggest that I shouldn't consider using a modern Honda.

RealClassic has always tried to reflect what 'classic' means. To PUB that's a Vincent or a Flying Flea, to FW an AMC or Norton, and to Alan Cathcart probably a Ducati or something similarly exotic. In my case my MZ Supa5 is certainly a classic. There is obviously no acceptable true definition of the word, at least in the world of motorcycles. Live and let live is my motto.

Tony Bishop, member

One of the best features of RC life is that we can all express our views about bikes – and while I often (very often!) disagree with some of the thoughts shared in these pages, they're always entertaining. Which is what it's all about, really. I think. ***Frank W***

PREVIOUSLY ON REALCLASSIC…

I thought I'd bring you up to date with a bike that you reviewed in RC in 2008. It's an AJS Model 16 which is listed on various old paperwork and it's as a 16S, a 16M and a 16MS – perhaps you can enlighten me as to which one is correct? I bought it last year from a good friend, possibly the son of the owner back when you reviewed the bike.

I'm sure you'll be glad to know that it's still a 'nice, if reserved ride' and is still in pretty much original condition apart from the seat and rear carrier.

I would also like to let you know how much I enjoy Frank's articles. Always very well expressed and with your wry sense of humour and pithy (but usually entirely accurate) comments on old motorcycles and the oddballs who love. Frank's history with Bonnevilles caught my attention as I have a very special – to me at least – 1967 UK spec T120 that is absolutely the best bike I've ridden. It was restored to its well-above original standard by a friend of mine, Hugh Brown. He is a perfectionist and an extremely knowledgeable chap especially on Triumph unit twins. You could not class his bikes as original, although you wouldn't know to look at them, but specially balanced engines, 12-volt electronic ignition, stainless fasteners and some subtle chrome, carb intakes, brake operating levers, etc, give you a ride that no normal Triumph T120 could give you.

He even likes to paint the insides of the exhaust downpipes with heatproof paint, so they don't blue too easily. Finally sets them up with such attention that they really are what we should have loved out of an original Bonnie but seldom got.

Keep writing the articles and keep us all chuckling but well informed. THANKS!

John Cook

Thanks go to you, John! Very kind. The Ajay is a Model 16MS, the 'S' standing for 'sprung', which it is. Great bikes – as indeed are T120 Bonnevilles. ***Frank W***

SHURELY SHOME MISHTAKE?

With regards to my article in RC226 about my T160 Trident. I made a mistake with names! It wasn't Frank Difazio, it was Jack. An honest mistake brought on by old age.

Phil Archer, member

If only every error was so easy to correct: thanks for letting us know, Phil. ***Rowena***

SALES PITCH

In response to Rob Smith's letter in RC227, I think many readers like me will identify with Rob. Although we're old hands at ownership we will not be old hands at selling and we tend to hang on to our purchases. I'm now up to six bikes, all very different. I recently decided my 500lb Yamaha MT01 was now getting too heavy and explored the various routes of selling. Short of taking a very low cash offer from a dealer, all other options started to fill me with dread.

A few words of wisdom from those old hands who will have done loads of selling would be of great help to us unwitting collectors.

Colin Atkinson, member

I'd definitely be interested in advice about selling bikes. Although I've had several machines over the years, I think I've only sold one, for 20 quid or so, to a mate. All the others have been stolen or written off. Now I want to sell possibly two, and I'm not a good salesperson.

Alan MacLennan, member

Righto! I'm on the case. I can't promise to come up with answers that you'll like, but I can explore the various options and the pros and cons. Watch this space… ***Rowena***

TRAVELLER'S TALES

Tony Duffield's encounter with a group of German BMW riders in RC226 reminded me of a trip that we made to Czechoslovakia soon after it regained its independence. A group of other riders glanced somewhat disparagingly at my very well-worn 500 Triumph at a petrol station. There was already quite a lot of wear on the bits in boxes from which it was assembled (originally as a 350) a few years previously. In the photo it's receiving some attention in Paris: note the sophisticated luggage arrangements.

One of the riders wandered over and I said, in my very limited German, '400,000 kilometres' as I had clocked up over 200,000 miles on it in seven years despatch riding. The chap then explained the reason for the bike's appearance to his friends, who looked quite impressed.

A couple of weeks later, the bike's limited aesthetics saved us a load of aggravation. After a few relaxing days in the pleasant Moravian spa town of Luhacovice (kept well maintained in the Soviet era as a reward posting for well-behaved officials), we took a quick blast down to Vienna. Until then, no-one had stopped us at any border crossing, but at the Austrian border on the way back the guard looked the bike over. 'You came from England on this?' he asked, incredulously. 'I must stamp your passport to show you came here!'

A few yards down the road, the Czech border guard was very old-school, looking at us, both our passports, his computer screen (twice) and scowling darkly. I fear that, without the correct Austrian stamp, it would have been salt-mine time for us.

Also mentioned in that issue was a ride across the Mohave desert, which has an extra peril not always noted. In 2003 an old friend who had moved to Los Angeles kindly lent us his 1969 Bonneville which needed some reassembly and some electrical problems sorting. Eventually we ran out of fettling time and headed off, hoping for the best and equipped with assorted spares and a basic map. Both fuel consumption and tank size were educated guesses, so we aimed for as straight a line as possible as we cut across a corner of the desert.

Suddenly we were stopped by two armed guards – for security reasons, Edwards Airforce Base was not shown on the map! They had no idea where the nearest petrol station would be, but wished us luck as we retraced our route to a highway and thankfully found fuel before the fumes ran out.

Phil Bootherstone, member 10,336

TYPHOON ALERT!

Just finished Frank's article on riding the 350. This is a 600cc Typhoon which came out of an American museum and was brand new, never started. A magneto rewind got it motoring. My experience mirrored yours: unbelievably raucous, dangerously fast and a rider (me) who has to face being past it.

It was great to look at but I could not think of any sane use for it. I sold it back to the dealer and it ended up… back in a museum.

Phillip White, member

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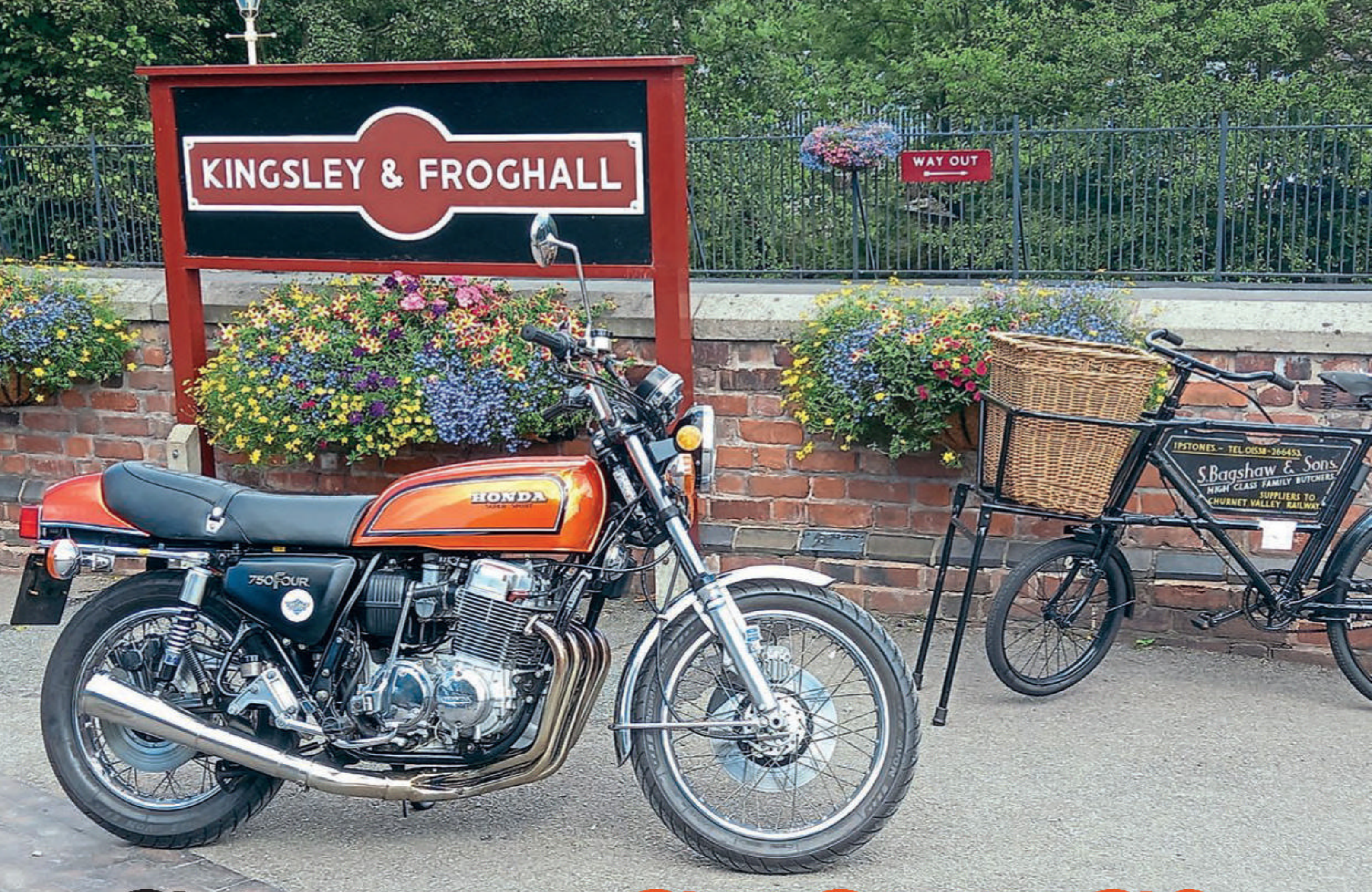


SUPER SPORTS?

Did you miss out on an adventure in your youth? Edward Foreman spent the summer of '77 with entirely the wrong type of transport. So he's making up for lost time with a single-cam Honda…

Photos by Edward Foreman / RC RChive

The first part of my motorcycling life came to a violent end one Saturday morning in February 1977, on the Newcastle Road out of Market Drayton in Shropshire. I was riding my Suzuki GT500A and had just crossed the road bridge over the Shropshire Union canal. I was taken by surprise as a yellow Ford Capri towing a boat trailer emerged from my left while attempting to complete a right turn.

Even today, almost 45 years later, I can still see the driver's face as he came to a stop in the middle of the road… just before I hit him plumb-bob centre. I remember well seeing my Suzuki's fuel tank fly up in the air while I was also airborne, traversing the roof. I was very, very lucky and only sustained bruises.

Shortly after the demise of the Suzuki I broke up with my girlfriend in the worst possible way. I was desolate. What I should have done was to brush myself down and go straight out and buy a brand new Yamaha RD400. Did I do that? No, of course not. Instead I bought a 1968 Morris 1000 Traveller with rotten wood. Hence the summer of 1977 was a dreary, miserable one for me, driving around on L-plates.

My break from motorcycling lasted nine years, but to this day they have been a massive part of who I am. I now own modern motorcycles and older machines have always held an interest for me. Of late I have been attracted to the local VMCC, and I've been on a few of their runs with my 2015 Triumph Bonneville T100. This got me thinking about buying an older bike to use on VMCC runs.

What to buy? The two choices were obvious: a red GT500A Suzuki just like the one I had in 1977, or the Yamaha RD400 I didn't buy back then. I had already exorcised the ghost of the Suzuki in the 1980s when you could pick up these bikes for a few hundred quid. I bought two and made a lovely one out of the pair. But that ruled out a GT this time around.

A Yamaha RD400? This was the bike I should have brought in 1977 but now they cost a fortune. Having brought a good one would you really want to use it? Instead, what about a Honda CB750: the original superbike? A sand-cast or K0, or even a K2 would again be too expensive. I liked the idea of a K6, the very last of the original, four-pipe bikes. The problem was finding a good one, and even one of these could be £6000 or more.

What about a CB750 F1 or F2 SuperSport? I saw an F2 at a local dealer but it sold very fast. 'If you really want a CB750 then I have a 1975 F I can let you have,' said Jim, a man I've known for many years and from whom I've bought bikes in the past. 'Take it for a ride,' Jim said.

The CB750 went well for a bike of over 40 years of age. Yes, there were issues which I was mentally storing in my head, plus a few things I would change, but £600 should cover all that. I decided to buy it, and so a 1975 CB750F (or F0) American market SuperSport became mine.

Built in 1975, a year before we received the F1 in the UK, the F or F0 was the first in a line of four bikes: F/F0, F1, F2,and F3. These were

In the company of Fours…

HONDA
CB750F

introduced by Honda to update the CB750 and to compete with hot competition from Kawasaki's 900 Z1 and Z650, plus Suzuki's GS range of inline four-cylinder four-strokes. In many ways the CB SuperSports were stop-gap models until Honda had developed its own range of dohc fours. They represent the end of the line in a way, with the F2 having the distinction of being the most powerful sohc CB750.

By 1975 Honda's CB750 had been in production for six years. The F SuperSports had a number of changes over the K series aimed at increasing performance and handling. These consisted of a lower gearing, revisions to the camshaft, higher compression ratio and revised pistons. The engine's redline was raised from 8000rpm to 8500 rpm, and it was fitted with a four-into-one exhaust, rear disc brake and revised larger fuel tank. Honda also revised the chassis. These changes resulted in improved acceleration and better handling at the expense of overall top speed.

It is said that the SuperSports bikes were originally designed to replace the K series four-pipers, but they were not quite the sales success Honda had hoped for. The K series remained in production alongside the SuperSports bikes, largely as a result of customer and dealer pressure.

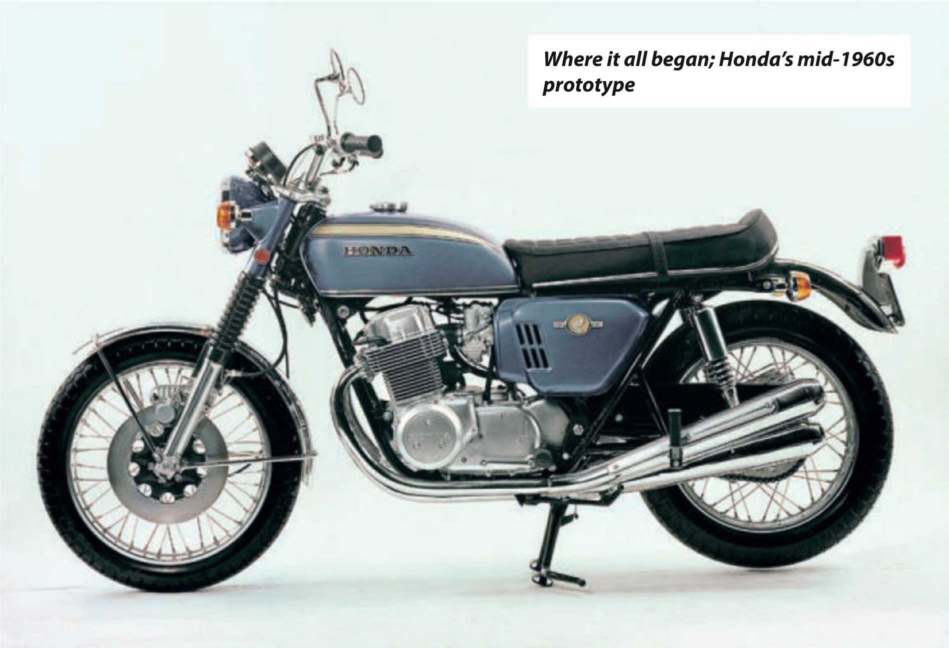
During its production life some 553,000 sohc CB750s were made, of these 15,000 were F/F0 models, making it one of the rarer CB750s. It was available in two colours, Candy Sapphire Blue and Sunrise Orange.

Mine is Sunrise Orange and I think you will agree it looks really nice. My bike was one of the last produced in March 1975 and it was last on the United States roads in Danville, Vermont in July 2011. It was imported into the UK in 2016.

Many readers may have owned and run Honda CB750s in the past, but for me this is a new experience. Checking the build details from reference books, my bike appears to have its original engine. The clocks are correct for the year, so I think the recorded 26,000 miles may be correct. I was surprised to find that on this engine the primary drive is taken from the crankshaft via twin, centrally mounted chains. These together with a degree of clutch rattle make the bike quite noisy on tickover, but you have to remember this is an air-cooled four cylinder engine whose design goes back to 1968. Balancing the carburettors helps. If the engine quietens down when lifted off tickover and the clutch is pulled in then everything is OK, I am told!

The lovely thing about old bikes is that they get better and better as you sort assorted problems out. New bikes only get worse as the mileage increases! On the CB I've adjusted the valve clearances (screw and lock nut), set the manual camchain tensioner, balanced the carburettors, renewed both front and rear braking systems completely – pads, fluids, hoses, and rebuilt the front caliper.

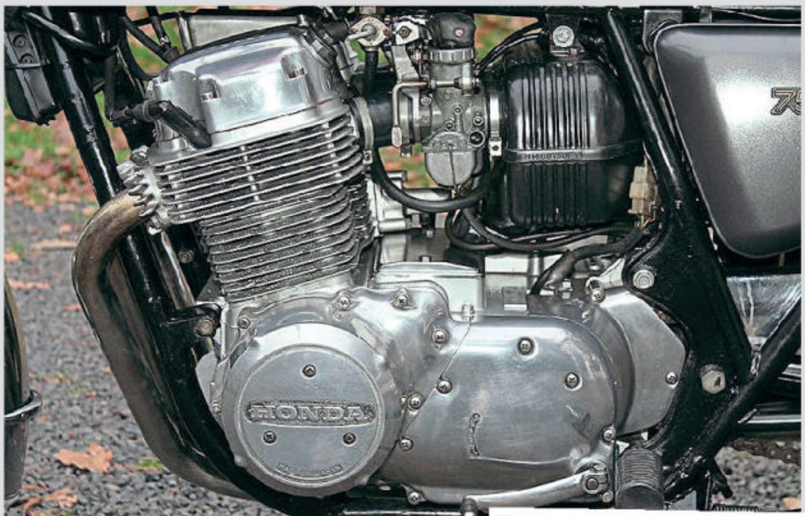
My bike had received some attention ➤



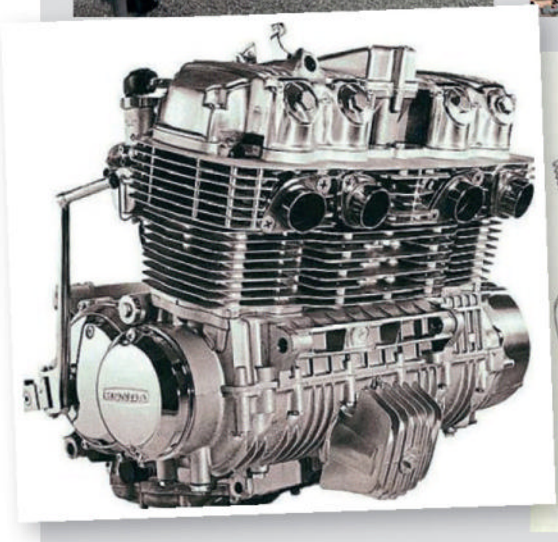
Where it all began; Honda's mid-1960s prototype

INSIDE THE ENGINE

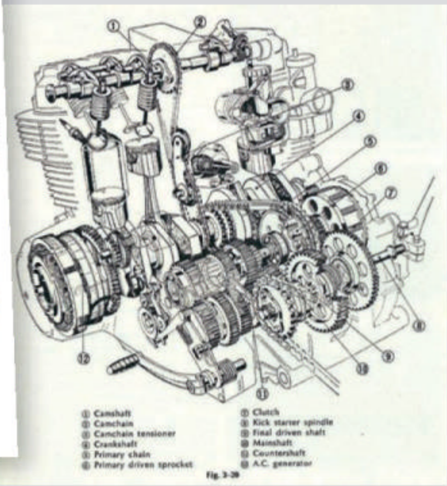
HONDA
SUPER SPORT

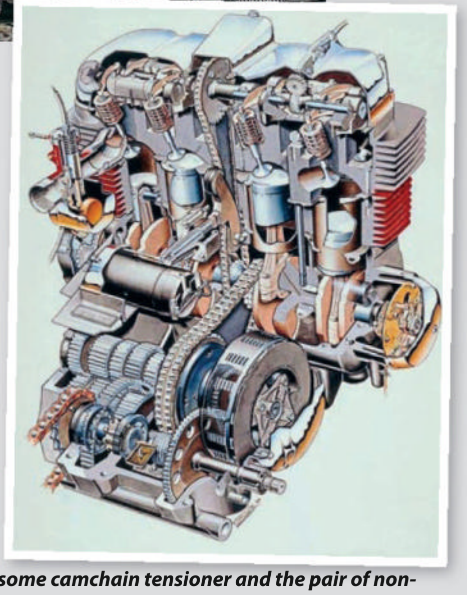


The heart of the Honda. This is indeed the engine which changed the shape of motorcycling



Taken out of the bicycle, the true size of the powerplant is revealed


① Camshaft
② Camchain
③ Camchain tensioner
④ Crankshaft
⑤ Primary chain
⑥ Primary driven sprocket
⑦ Clutch
⑧ Kick starter spindle
⑨ Final driven shaft
⑩ Mainshaft
⑪ Countershaft
⑫ A.C. generator
Fig. 3-28



How it all works. Check out the occasionally troublesome camchain tensioner and the pair of non-adjustable primary chains

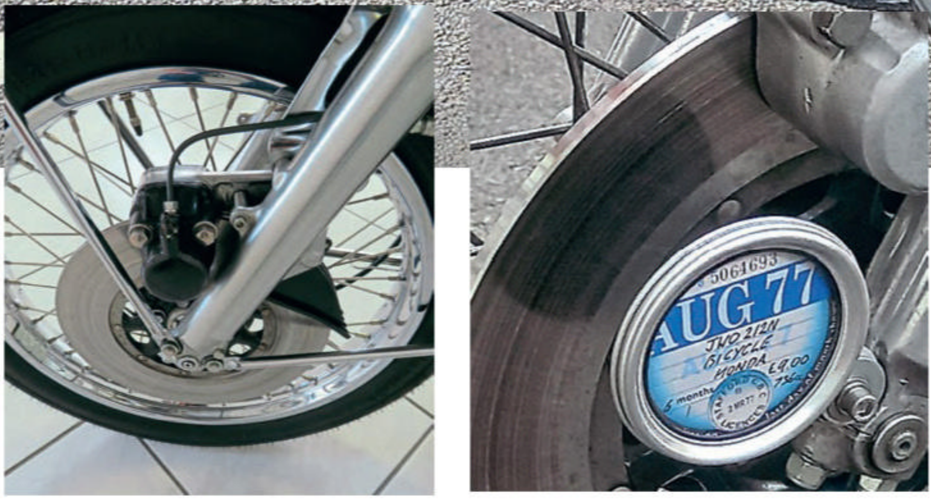
mph
x1000rpm
OIL
HIGH BEAM
NEUTRAL
TURN
IGNITION

Clear clocks, 1970s Honda style

to its front forks, and they appeared to be in good condition, having been rebuilt quite recently. The same could not be said for the rear suspension. While the swinging arm bushes were in good condition and only required greasing via the conveniently situated grease nipples, the rear suspension units had poor damping performance, which I guess was only to be expected after 47 years. As a result, my first ride was 'interesting', in that any attempt to corner at speeds approaching 60mph resulted in the bike pitching. The lack of adequate damping at the rear resulted in me being shaken like a rag doll, and the higher, US-spec handlebars added to the problem. They were one of the first things on my list to change, but after riding the bike I decided that I like them and the comfortable riding position the give, so they've had a reprieve.

Returning to the rear suspension, new units

HONDA
SUPER SPORT
750FOUR



The earlier single disc, with its pivoting caliper holder design, wasn't the most powerful. The replica tax disc is a commemoration of a Morris Minor!

would be needed. I've had good results in the past with Hagon units on my Hinckley T100 Bonneville so decided to go down this route. I only weigh 70kg (around 11 stone), so for me the spring rate does not need to be too hard. My first set of Hagon units came initially with 20kg springs and these proved to be much too hard, and 18kg springs have been ideal on the Bonnie. So when it came to ordering new units for the Honda I specified 18kg springs and have been very happy with the results. I now have a balanced bike, which shod on Avon Roadrider tyres handles predictably with grip sufficient to ground the exhaust.

The term 'Supersport' is a bit misleading. My bike has a number of mods which restored the sohc engine's power to the level of the original 1968 bike, but still its top speed is considerably lower due to the lower overall gearing. The result is a bike where you select top gear at 30mph and forget the gear pedal. Any overtakes are simply a matter of opening the throttle and the bike just goes.

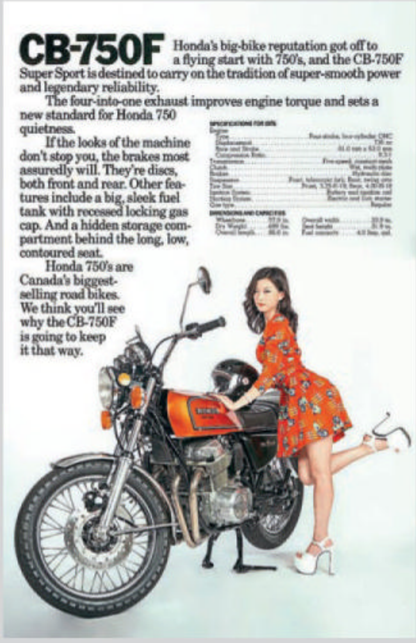
They say you should never meet your heroes, and I think that's true. In 1975 a 750 was a 'big' bike. Riding the CB750 these days is quite a gentle experience. The engine produces a similar power output to my Hinckley Bonneville and much less torque. Not only that, but the Honda's torque is delivered at much higher engine revs. So compared to my T100 the CB750 is no firebrand. It does feel very busy at 50mph in fifth gear with the engine rotating at 4000rpm.

To be fair, they are separated by forty years of motorcycle development, and the Honda is giving away almost 100cc. Even so, point to point, my Hinckley Bonneville would easily leave the CB750 for dead. I am more sympathetic to the Honda and its forty-plus years, of course, rarely using more than 6000rpm.

It's interesting to see how the Honda was received in 1975. *Cycle Guide* in the USA said it was 'closer to being what many buyers want, but quite different from what Honda has previously been building… The CB750F is better than earlier CB750s for some riders and worse for others.' *Cycle World* commented that 'The Supersport is less comfortable in some ways and more comfortable in others than its predecessor. It handles better than any other large standard Japanese bike I know, which makes it more fun than Honda 750s have ever been.'

In the UK, *Bike* magazine noted that ➤

BROCHURE COUNTRY



CB-750F Honda's big-bike reputation got off to a flying start with 750's, and the CB-750F Super Sport is destined to carry on the tradition of super-smooth power and legendary reliability.

The four-into-one exhaust improves engine torque and sets a new standard for Honda 750 quietness.

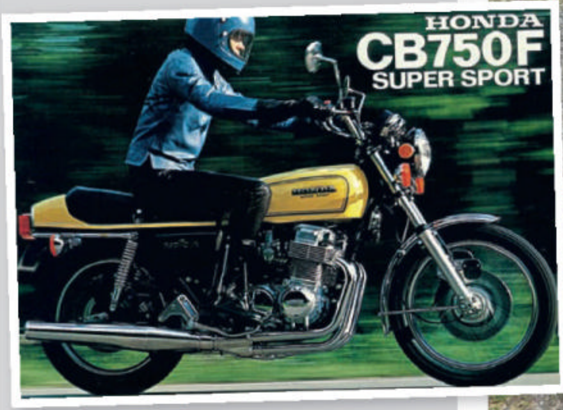
If the looks of the machine don't stop you, the brakes most assuredly will. They're discs, both front and rear. Other features include a big, sleek fuel tank with recessed locking gas cap. And a hidden storage compartment behind the long, low, contoured seat.

Honda 750's are Canada's biggest-selling road bikes. We think you'll see why the CB-750F is going to keep it that way.

Matching dress?

The all-new and spectacularly styled Super Sport! A great combination of exciting power and reassuring safety features

Yellow? Hmmm…



Honda's bright café chaser

'the F feels a very different machine to any previous CB750. The 750F is my idea of what a fast tourer ought to be, rather than a Supersport. Acceleration is smooth rather than rapid, and our electronically timed top speed of 114mph is pretty mundane. But the unfussy delivery of torque from way down up to the 8500 redline makes life easy, and you don't need to play footsie with the gear pedal. The F is one of the smoothest, most mild mannered and manageable big bikes I've ridden.'

For me, the Honda is a gentle, nicely balanced road bike well suited to A-roads. SuperSport? Maybe that's stretching it a bit. What it is, is massively flexible. I also feel there is more of me invested in the CB750. I suppose I feel a deeper connection with the Honda because it's improved and got so much better under my ownership. I really enjoy riding it, and its ownership has opened up a whole new world of VMCC runs with the North Staffs and Ironmasters branches. A nice café serving tea and cake are never too far away.

And that long dreary summer of 1977 which I spent in the Morris? It's commemorated in a replica tax disc, made by RC subscriber PoplarGreg, with an expiry date of August 1977! Rc

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A Better BLEND

Photos by Paul Miles

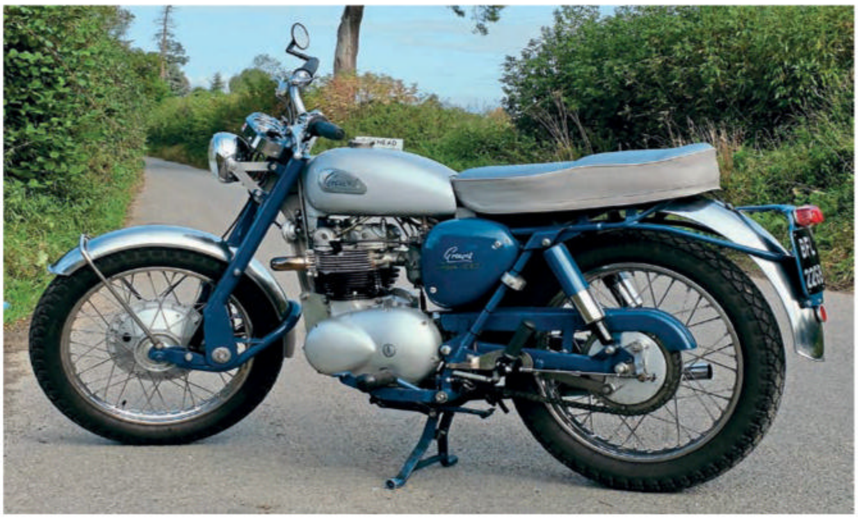
Some implausible partnerships end in disaster. Others might be marriages made in heaven. Paul Miles encounters a special kind of greeph…

If you're unlucky enough to actually know me, my fondness for specials will come as no surprise. I've always been attracted to the romantic notion that a factory machine might be improved by a bloke working in his garden shed with only Radio Four and a flask of sweet tea acting as his development assistants. The reality can be somewhat different, of course. Who could forget the questionable practicality and subjective beauty of gems such as the NorImp or Moto Shifty? Quite. On the other hand, some of the prettiest and most useful British café racers of the 1960s involved a marriage between a Norton bicycle and Triumph twin engine, the Triton.

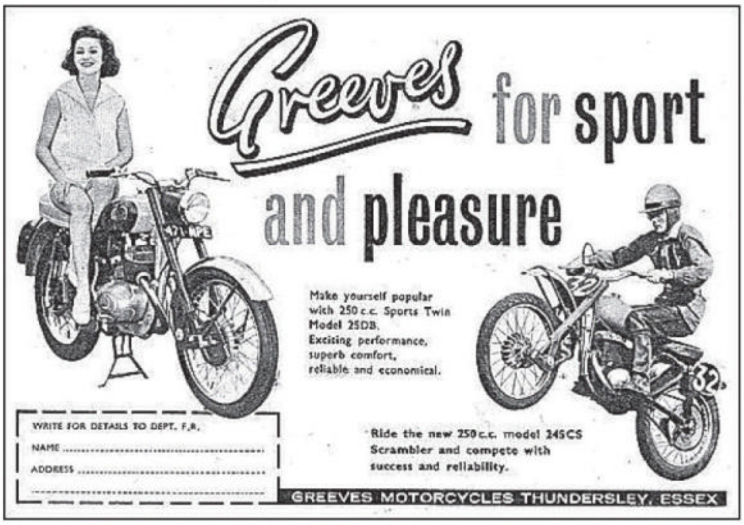
Another of these mutant creations gained traction with the resurgence in pre-65 trials – perhaps just because there happened to be enough old stuff lying around in sheds at the time. This was the unlikely union between unit Triumph power and, frankly, an odd design of chassis that hailed from Essex: the Tri-Greeves, aka Grumph or even Greeph!

Walking around this diminutive beauty, it doesn't look so shed-built. In fact, with its nicely fitting panels and high standard of finish it looks more like a nicely restored example of a factory production machine. In truth, apart from the slightly homespun appearance of the instrument panel, you might be forgiven for assuming that Bert Greeves went into partnership with Triumph to create this. The compact,

➤



The best of both worlds. Triumph's 500 twin engine sitting very comfortably in Greeves' unusual bicycle



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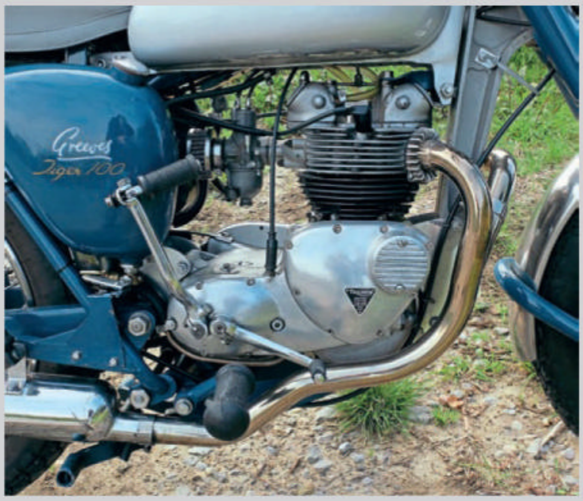
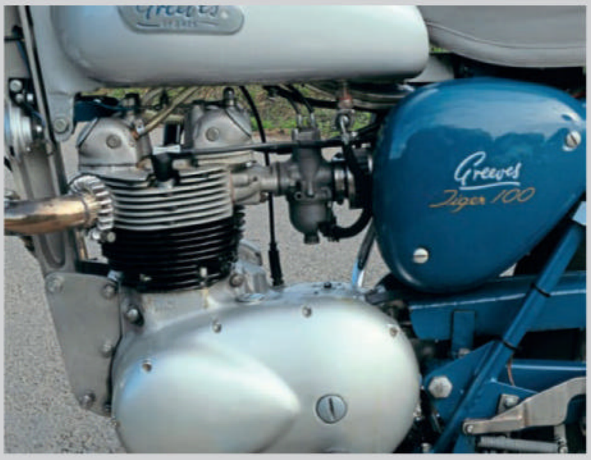
GREEVES MOTORCYCLES THUNDERSLEY, ESSEX

Greeves did build a twin of their own, of course. That is not Ace Tester Miles sitting on it, we can reveal



Triumph's smaller twin works a treat in the Greeves alloy frame

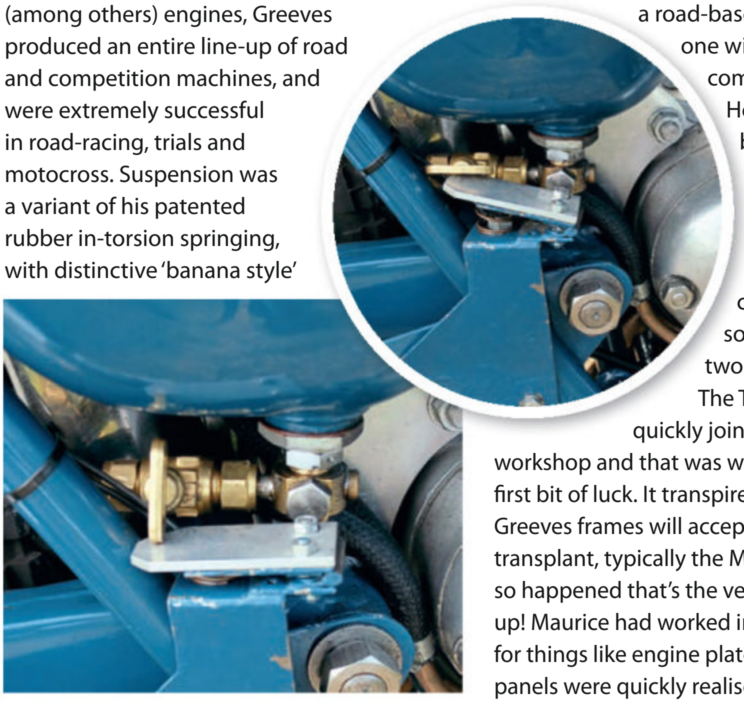


The drive side shows off the neat installation and indeed the previously BSA toolbox

unit-construction motor sits beautifully within the silhouette of the motorcycle, promising half-litre fun both on and off the road. Even the pre-unit BSA oil tank and toolbox look as if they were designed in Essex, not Birmingham, and the much-maligned conical hub brakes might even stand a chance of hauling up such a featherweight.

Bert Greeves produced his unique style of motorcycles from a factory in Thundersley, near Southend in Essex, following commercial success with the InvaCar three-wheeled invalid carriage that was once such a common sight on British roads. A keen competition trials rider, he understood that light weight and controllable power were the key to success. His bikes showcased much of the knowledge gleaned from his commercial foray into car manufacture.

Usually fitted with two-stroke Villiers (among others) engines, Greeves produced an entire line-up of road and competition machines, and were extremely successful in road-racing, trials and motocross. Suspension was a variant of his patented rubber in-torsion springing, with distinctive 'banana style' leading-link front forks and a massive I-beam of cast LM6 silicon-aluminium serving as the main frame member. Bert added his own foundry to the Essex factory for the manufacture of these and other parts.



One slightly unusual oil tap arrangement

It was one such I-beam that caught the eye of Dorset man Maurice McGladdery as he perused piles of rusting junk at an autojumble. He'd long held the notion of building a Trumpeting Greeves, having spent time in the muddy trenches of scrambling and trials. But now any build would be purely as a road-based machine, albeit one with a nod to its competition history. Hence the cleverly bent low exhaust, allowing for lower footpegs, road tyres and a dual seat, pre-dating the current fashion for soft roaders by nearly two decades!

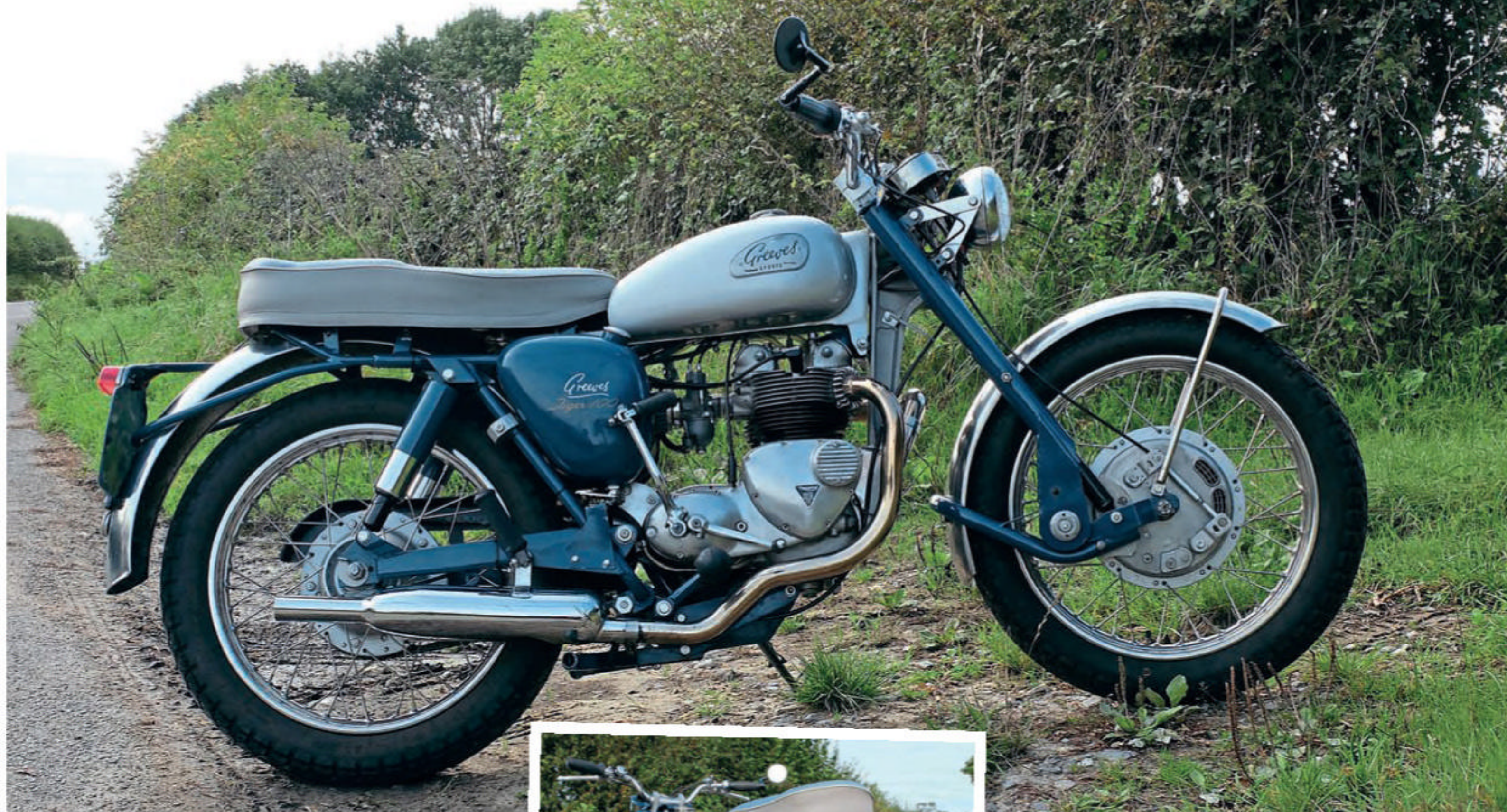
The T100SS motor quickly joined the I-beam in the workshop and that was when Maurice had his first bit of luck. It transpires that only certain Greeves frames will accept such a heart transplant, typically the MX chassis, and it just so happened that's the very thing he'd picked up! Maurice had worked in CAD, so drawings for things like engine plates and instrument panels were quickly realised and turned into metal; the Greeph began to take shape.

As with any sensible builder, jobs he couldn't make to his exacting standards were farmed out, like the exquisite siamesed exhaust system, designed to maximise ground clearance without compromising leg comfort. Amal were unable to provide a carburettor of the correct size at the time, so he took a chance on a Wassell copy which has always performed faultlessly. I've only really got two criticisms about the aesthetics: the large bolt-on aluminium clamps holding the aforementioned BSA tool box and oil tanks and the (slightly Heath Robinson) tap on the oil feed.

Maurice told me; 'I didn't want to butcher the frame by welding on brackets, so the clamps are a fully reversible solution and the oil tap has a microswitch attached to the aluminium plate that cuts power to the ignition should you try and start it with the oil supply turned off'.

Everything works perfectly. I'm an idiot, just ignore me.

Starting the Greeph is, of course, typically Triumph easy peasy. Oil tap on, fuel on, tickle the Wassell carb. Turn the key and one kick usually gets the diminutive machine ticking



away happily. The Pazon ignition probably helps, too. After checking for charge and oil return (do we all do that *every* time, I wonder? There's a question for the letters page), it's a pull of the featherweight clutch and a snick down into the first of four gears.

I'd say the gearing feels a bit short, perfect for blasting around country lanes, but perhaps a little thrashy at higher speeds. Like many old bikes, its comfort zone is between 35-60mph. I've seen 80 on the (slightly under-reading) speedo, but it seems a little cruel to regularly subject a beauty like this to such punishment.

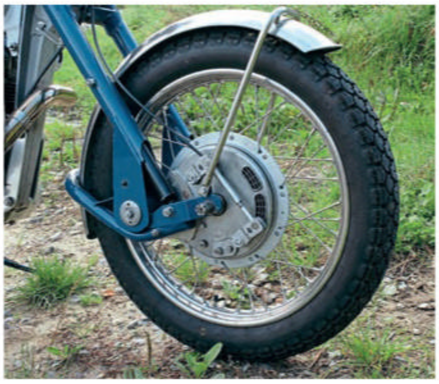
Down a country lane though, it all gets a bit Steve McQueen as you power slide into and out of corners. Find me a barbed wire fence to jump over into a neighbouring county, like Wiltshire. The juxtaposition of ultra-light weight, nimbleness and punchy engine is simply irresistible. Handling is sublime, Bert knew his stuff. The lack of front-end dive and the way in which the forks seem to rotate over bumps is magical and the whole set-up allows you to use the 'adequate' stopping power of those impressive-looking brakes to the full.

Ready to go anywhere…

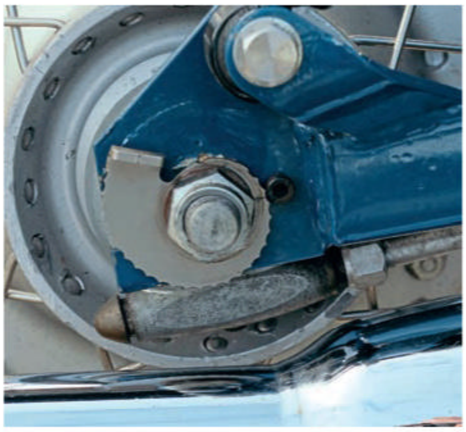
Lightweight machines require less power to propel them efficiently, too. The tiny-looking fuel tank holds less than two gallons, but that's enough to carry you for over 120 miles. Goodness, it's beautiful *and* practical.

Faults? After a darn good thrashing the venerable twin can get a little oily in the usual places which Meriden *cognoscenti* will know all about. New gaskets should mostly sort that, and the narrow drive chain stretches like a rubber band. But these are criticisms you might level at any old bike, not just this special. The bars are on substantial risers; I'd personally prefer them a touch lower, and there are neater oil taps with electrical cut outs available these days. Maurice's admittedly clever design just has the feel of something that might fail and leave you stranded.

But there's not much I'd change. This Tri-Greeves is a perfect choice for day to day riding, as well as shrugging off with contempt my pathetic attempt at using it for a VMCC green-laning event. On or off-road, it's a far more competent motorcycle than I'll ever be a rider, fast and reliable. It looks nothing like a typical 'special' and I like to think Bert would approve of seeing his name on such a wonderful machine. RC



Greeves' famously eccentric front end, complete with a neatly installed BSA / Triumph 2ls conical hub wheel and brake



Rear chain adjustment is by snail cams

Sentiers GR 36 Caen
et 223/E9 Cabourg
PIETONS ATTENTION!
A LA SONNERIE
EVACUEZ L'OUVRAGE
Norton
CLJ439

Photos by Jon Hurst

PRIDE OF Ownership

Some motorcycles are so special that it's worth selling three other machines to become the temporary custodian of a real rarity. That just what Lynne and Jon Hurst did when they acquired a Series A HRD…

HRD stands for Howard Raymond Davies. He was an accomplished Isle of Man TT racing legend who also manufactured his own bikes from 1924 until 1928, when he sold the HRD name to Philip Vincent. Philip Vincent produced his own machines, but also used proprietary engines from JAP and Rudge. The story goes that PV was so disgusted with the reliability of the Rudge engines he used for the 1934 TT that for 1935 he built his own engines. These engines all finished the race and were also produced for roadgoing machines like our 1936 HRD Comet. The TT bikes did have a few special parts, like a bronze cylinder head and larger petrol tank.

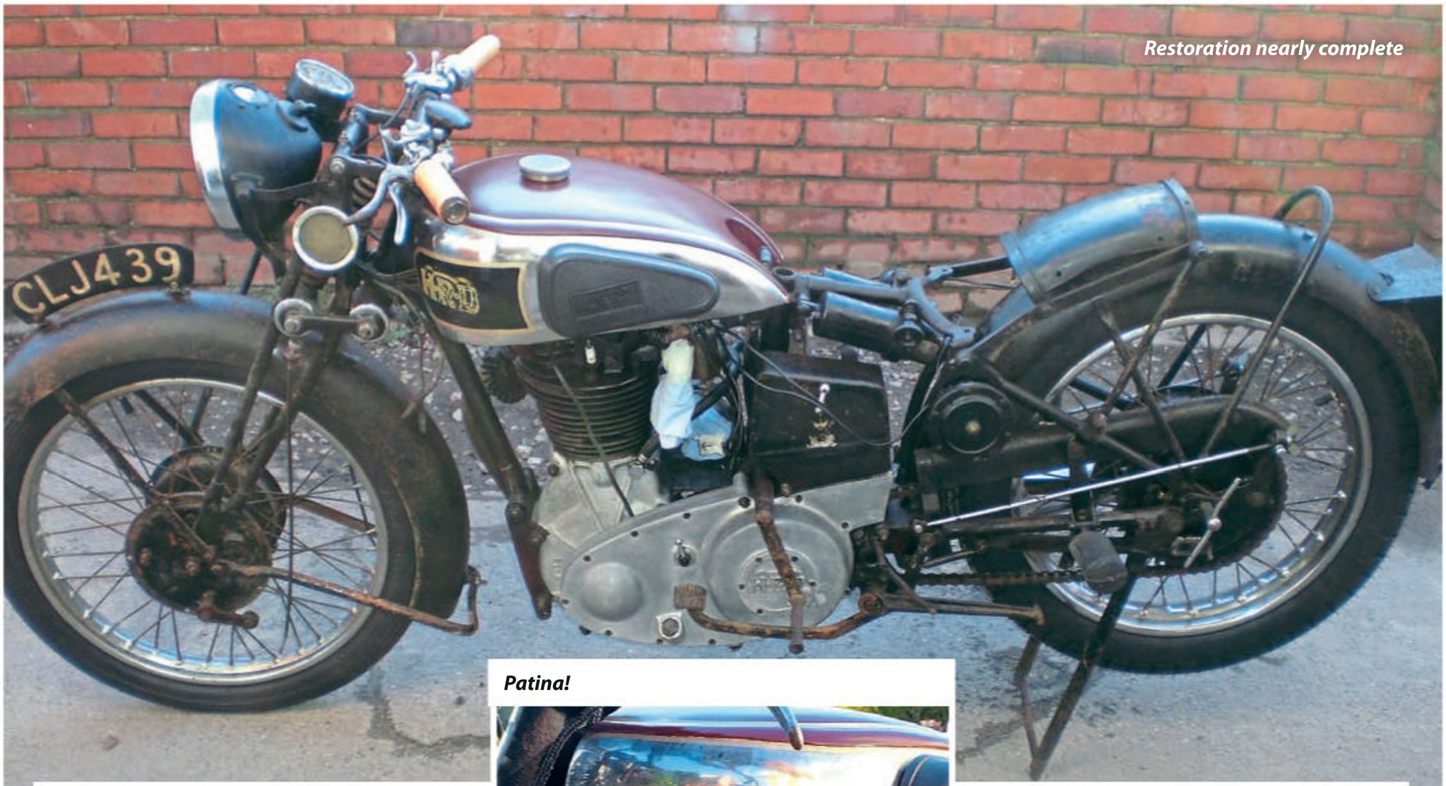
I first became aware of this Series A Comet from Alan, a workmate at Portsmouth dockyard. Alan is a prankster, so I endured eight years of torment and banter as he boasted about having an HRD but said that I would never see it. When we became closer friends with Al and his wife Gill, she mentioned that the bike belonged to her father, and told stories about him and his brother and their bikes.

In 2009 the time came for Gill to sell the Comet and she asked if I could offer any advice. With my other half, Lynne, I went to have a look. It had been stored since 1956 and still had the last tax disc attached. It hadn't turned a wheel since. It was a complete machine minus the gear lever and the engine had compression. I didn't know anything about pre-war Series A HRD-Vincents so suggested that Gill contact the Vincent Owners' Club. Unfortunately, although her dad had been a member, they couldn't find any records of him or the bike!

My sleepless nights started from this first viewing and I conducted some research into these rare machines. Gill was happy for me to have the bike but the rest of her family had to be considered and it had to be sold. We suggested selling via auction, as we could not advise how much they were worth. The family contacted an auction house who came around, very excited to view this 'barn find' along with a 1950 Model G Royal Enfield which shared the stable.

Gill told us about the auction house's appraisal. Lynne had really taken a shine to the Model G and we didn't want to separate the bikes – so we offered Gill a price in line with the auction house's ➤

Vincent at the seaside!



Restoration nearly complete

appraisal. The family accepted! But… how would we pay for them? Before we knew it both bikes were at our home, and we had yet to pay a penny! We sold three of our own bikes and added cash and then became the formal proud owners of the Vincent and the Enfield.

Restoration started straight away. When I drained the engine, I found clean, unused oil, which was a great start. By copying the original wiring harness I replicated a new electrical harness, while the Miller mag and dynamo were overhauled by APL Magnetos, who changed the dynamo from three brush to two brush. A modern, solid-state regulator was added, and I also modified the internals of the original rear light to include a brake light as none was fitted back in 1936.

The 8″ brake shoes were relined by Saftek, and the clutch and primary checked out fine. Lots of sealing washers and brake springs were bought from Conway Motors. I didn't want to take a chance with the originals (although they still held air) so two new tyres were fitted along with inner tubes. It came with a dual Vincent saddle, not original spec for a Series A. The straw lining was hanging out, so my mother-in-law re-covered it with an old brown leather coat of mine – and there was enough material for her to also cover the seat on the Model G! The Comet's original seat framework is still fitted, but the roomy dual seat is much more comfortable as it allows you to move around on the bike when cornering.

Patina!

The concours anoraks don't like that saddle… or the handlebar grips, but we were told they were from a WW2 gas mask. We like them and they are part of the bike's history. We don't know much of that history before it was parked up in 1956. We're not sure who the first owner was, who collected the bike from the Stevenage factory, but there is a brass dealer badge on the battery cover from GK Rae of Chiswick.

The original carb was refurbished and all oil lines replaced. A tap was added to prevent wet sumping – which I do on most of my bikes. Some cables were needed; JJ Cables used some of our originals as they did not have the pattern. The original Smiths 120mph speedometer was overhauled, keeping the original mileage of 20,880, which I believe to be correct due to the bike's long term storage. I also fitted a new chain and sprockets for good measure.

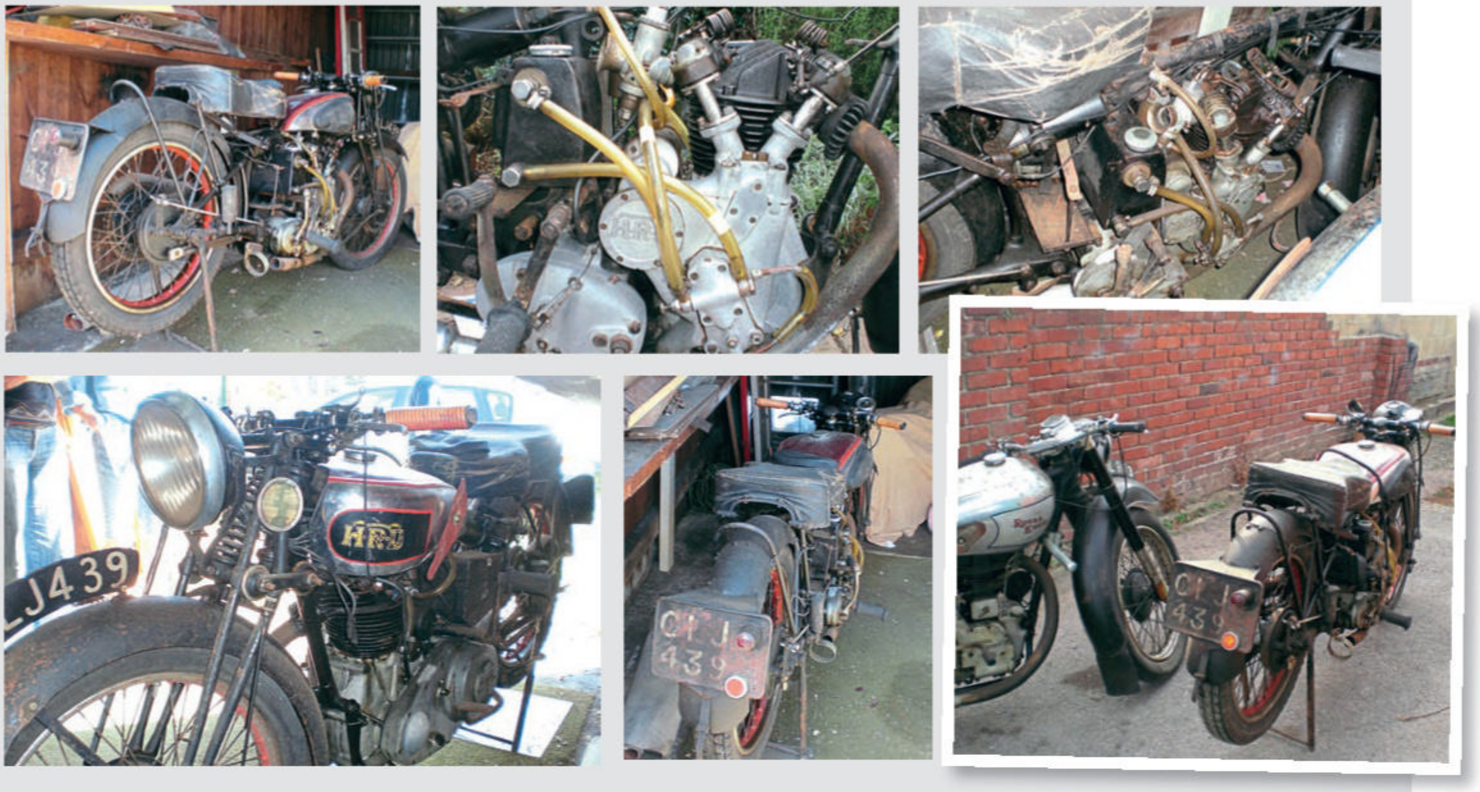
The maroon paint on the petrol tank was colour-matched and tidied up as it had flaked, and the paint on the rear number plate was tidied. No polishing was required as the bike was in great shape under the dust, with lovely patina which we did not want to spoil. It was treated to a wipe over with a linseed oil and turpentine mix.

The original wheels were given a clean up and the spokes checked and re-tensioned locally by Ken Brady. The nipples were brass so this was possible: new wheels would have spoiled the overall look.

I joined the Vincent Owners' Club and received invaluable help from their Series A expert. We obtained a copy of the bike's original factory record. This shows our machine was dispatched on the 20/10/36 and was fitted with Amal TT handlebars, Brampton forks, 120mph speedometer, Speedwell mudguards and a BD50 oil pump. It was built by Ted Hampshire and tested by George Brown and the weather was fine. Thankfully all these original fitments and much more are still on the bike.

VOC official Bob Stafford wrote several snippets about our Comet in the club's monthly magazine, *MPH*, as he kept records of all the pre-war bikes but had not come across this one before. With Bob's help I managed to sort out an oil pump issue (it was missing the internal oil restrictor) and the adjustment of the oil feed to the rockers, which is a bit fiddly. You set these on a fast tickover with 20 drops per minute for the inlet rocker and 30 drops per minute for the

VINCENT, BARN FOUND



exhaust. Later, we met Bob and his wife at a Series A rally and he was chuffed to see the Comet being ridden to the event.

I also had some help from another VOC member, Rod Farr, who loaned me a gear lever to copy plus some useful literature. In turn, I have helped other Series A owners with parts to copy and dimensions as our bike is very original. This is what Clubs are about!

Eventually our restoration was complete in 2010 and we could ride the bike back to the family of its former owner, to show Alan and Gill how it had turned out. When we arrived Gill was outside gardening and looked up with great delight on recognising the sound of the bike. She showed me a scar on her leg from a burn from the HRD exhaust from the days when her dad used to take her to school on it!

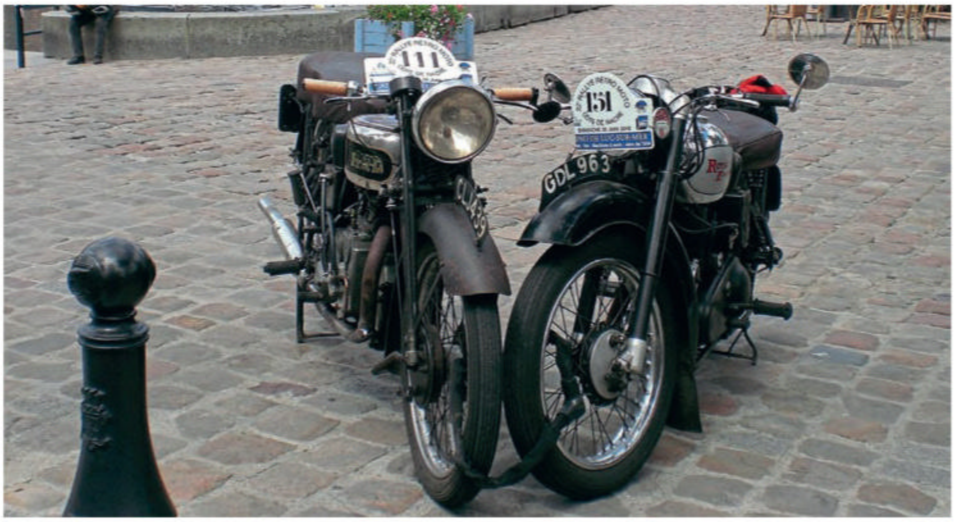
Almost immediately we loaded up with camping gear, for the Moto Retro Club Rally in France; me on the HRD and Lynne on the Model G. What could possibly go wrong? The rally is held over a weekend and consists of a jumble on the Saturday morning followed by beer and dinner. On the Sunday morning there are a few sore heads on the ride around Normandy with a suitably French two-hour stop for lunch. The Gendarmerie escort and club marshalls ensure that you don't have to stop for any traffic lights, sometimes you don't have to put your feet down for many miles. The run ends at Luc sur Mer seafront, with lots of cheering locals. This rally has some of the finest old French, Belgian, German, Italian and British machines, with a mixture of restored and unrestored which we prefer.

This time the run was about 130km and the HRD performed well although it was a bit smoky, which fitted in with a lot of the others. I liked the fact that not many people knew what it was until someone would notice the small print 'The Vincent HRD'. The run was completed with no problems from both bikes.

We always stay over for the week with our friends and visit the Normandy attractions; Pegasus Bridge, Arromanche, the Grand Bunker, Bayeux, etc. One day I was leading our group and noticed in the mirror that the Comet was smoking a bit so I gave it a clear out, opened the throttle and left them all behind. I pulled up to wait for them to catch up. As we went up a kerb to get off the road, I found the girders a bit too stiff to accomplish the manoeuvre. I saved the bike by diving under it, but the right-hand footrest was in three pieces! So had to ride back to base with my right foot on the pillion peg…

Next day, we went down to the old bike shop in Luc where they brazed up the footrest, refusing to take any money. Another day, with all of us ready to leave for a ride,

➤



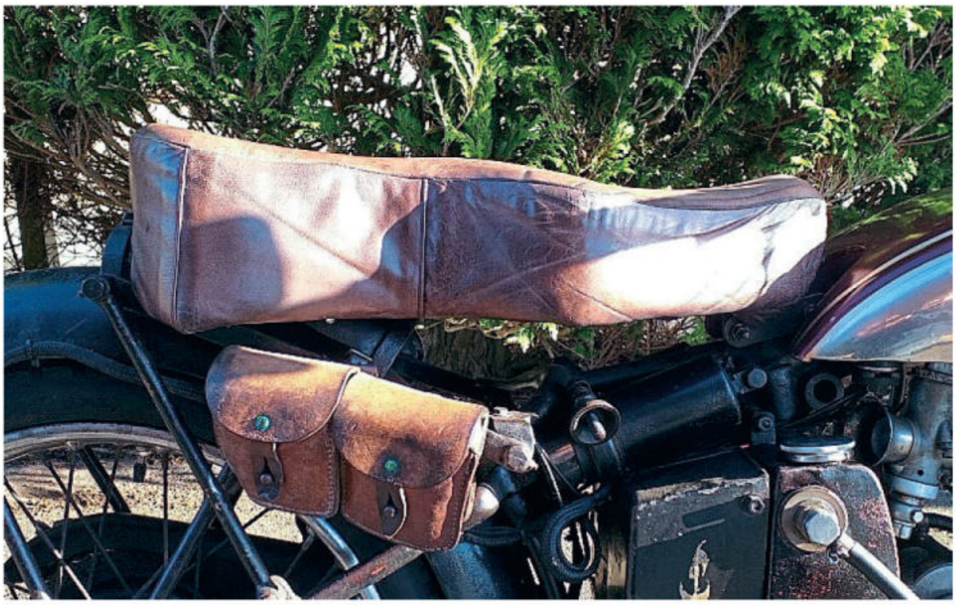
The Vincent came with a Royal Enfield. Here they are at Honfleur in Normandy – both bikes with rally plaques the bike started straight away but the top of the kickstart pedal flew off. Off we went to another local bike shop to drill and tap a temporary repair: again they refused to take my money! The Model G was fine all week.

That was about 300 miles for the Comet's shakedown mileage. I decided to address its smoking issue and enlisted the help of an old friend, Tom. At that time he was 86 but would still carry out engineering jobs, rebores and valve guides, etc in his home workshop, and he was still riding. Tom is one of my heroes: a legendary grasstrack racer, engineer, and wartime despatch rider. I asked him if he would have a look at the cylinder barrel and head as I was not familiar with the hairpin springs on the head. His opinion was that 'Vincents are overrated and overpriced; none worth more than £10k and generally not very good.' Even so, he agreed to have a look at ours!

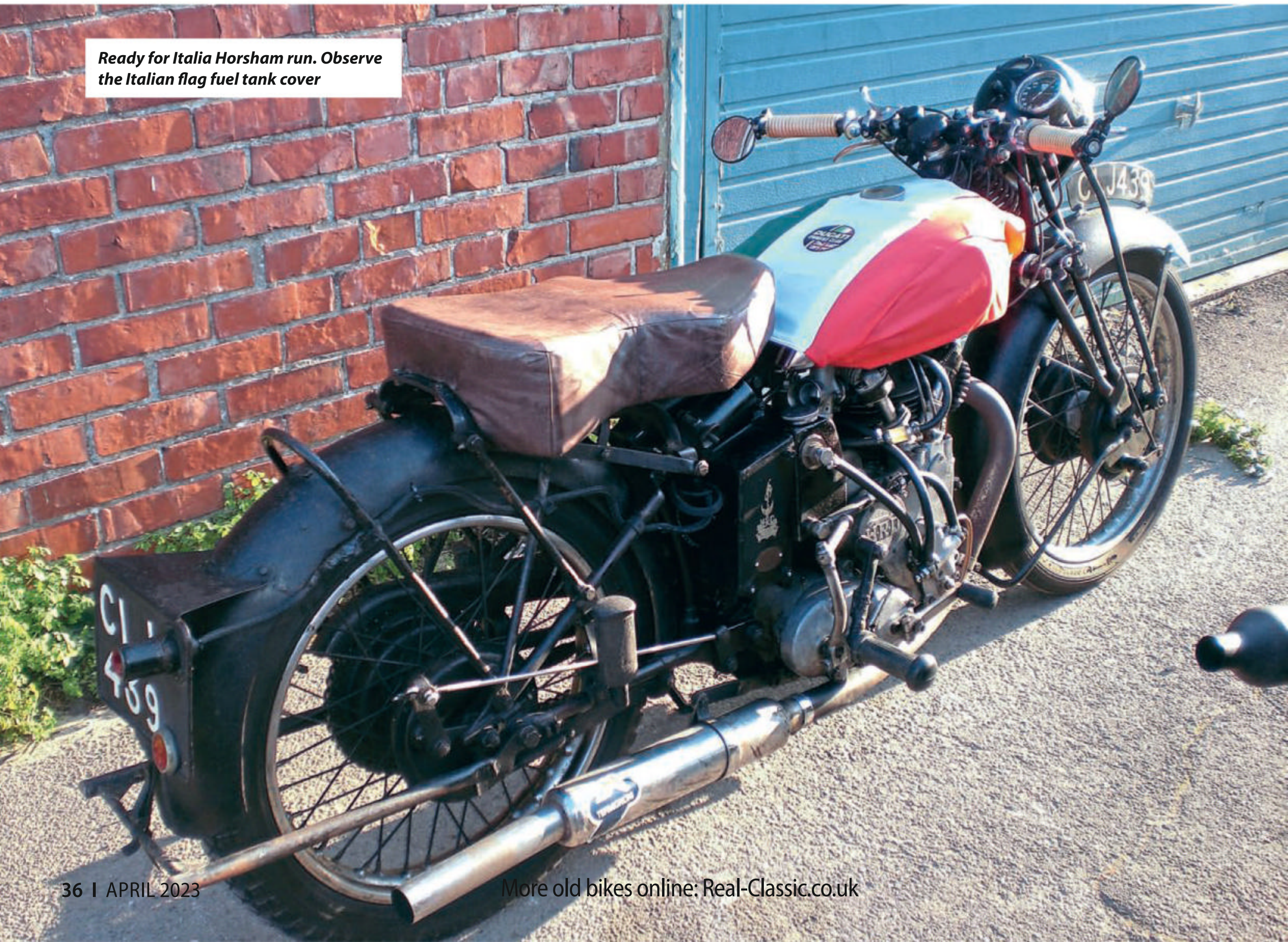
When he saw it on the bench, Tom said; 'You didn't tell me it was pre-war! A proper motorbike with Brampton forks.' He really didn't rate the postwar Girdraulics.

The piston fitted was a plus-20 Specialoid. We'd searched worldwide for a set of piston rings to no avail. Tom said not to worry and after a couple of weeks called to say 'all done'. He'd had a rummage in one of his sheds and found some suitable rings for the HRD. He'd completed the work to the head and it still runs great today. Afterwards I popped back on the bike to see him, and one of his old mates was there – a fella who used to own a Series A Comet. He'd sold it for £30 as it leaked a lot! He was very impressed how oiltight ours was. There have been other issues, however…

On another French rally, fully loaded, we were about 25 miles from the site when the HRD developed a major fuel leak. I made it to a hypermarket and noticed that the bronze float bowl was loose. I attempted to

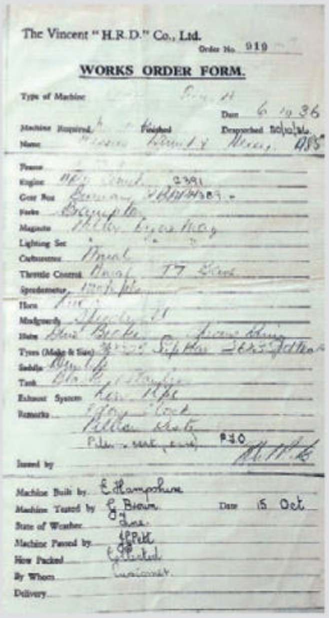


The seat cover started life as a leather coat. It is not universally admired, apparently



Ready for Italia Horsham run. Observe the Italian flag fuel tank cover

A LITTLE HISTORY



The Vincent "H.R.D." Co., Ltd.

Order No. 919

WORKS ORDER FORM.

Type of Machine [illegible]

Date 6 10 36

Machine Required [illegible] Finished Despatched 30/10/36

Name [illegible] 485

Frame

Engine [illegible] C391

Gear Box Burman [illegible]

Forks Brampton

Magneto Miller [illegible]

Lighting Set

Carburettor Amal

Throttle Control Amal [illegible]

Speedometer [illegible]

Horn [illegible]

Mudguards [illegible]

Stand [illegible] Brake [illegible]

Tyres (Make & Size) [illegible]

Saddle [illegible]

Tank [illegible]

Exhaust System [illegible] Pipe

Remarks [illegible]

Issued by

Machine Built by E Hampshire

Machine Tested by G Brown Date 15 Oct

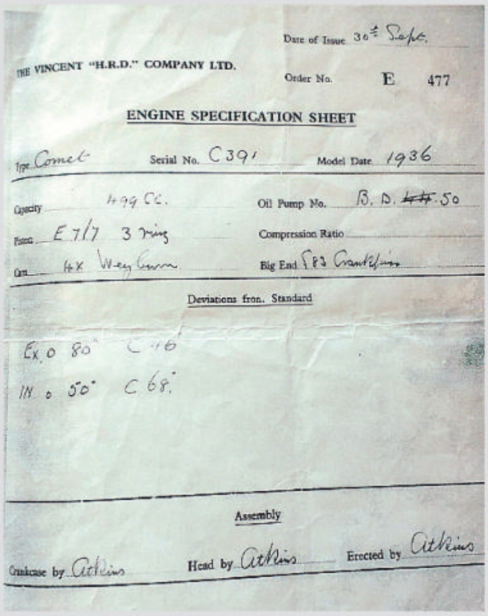
State of Weather Fine

Machine Passed by [illegible]

How Packed Collected

By Whom Customer

Delivery



THE VINCENT "H.R.D." COMPANY LTD.

Date of Issue 30th Sept.

Order No. E 477

ENGINE SPECIFICATION SHEET

Type Comet Serial No. C391 Model Date 1936

Capacity 499 CC. Oil Pump No. B. D. ~~44~~. 50

Piston E 7/7 3 ring Compression Ratio

Cam 4X Wey Gurm Big End [illegible] Crankpin

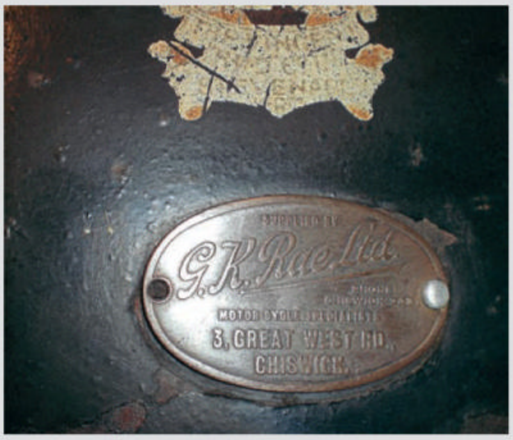
Deviations from. Standard

Ex. o 80° C 46°

IN. o 50° C 68°

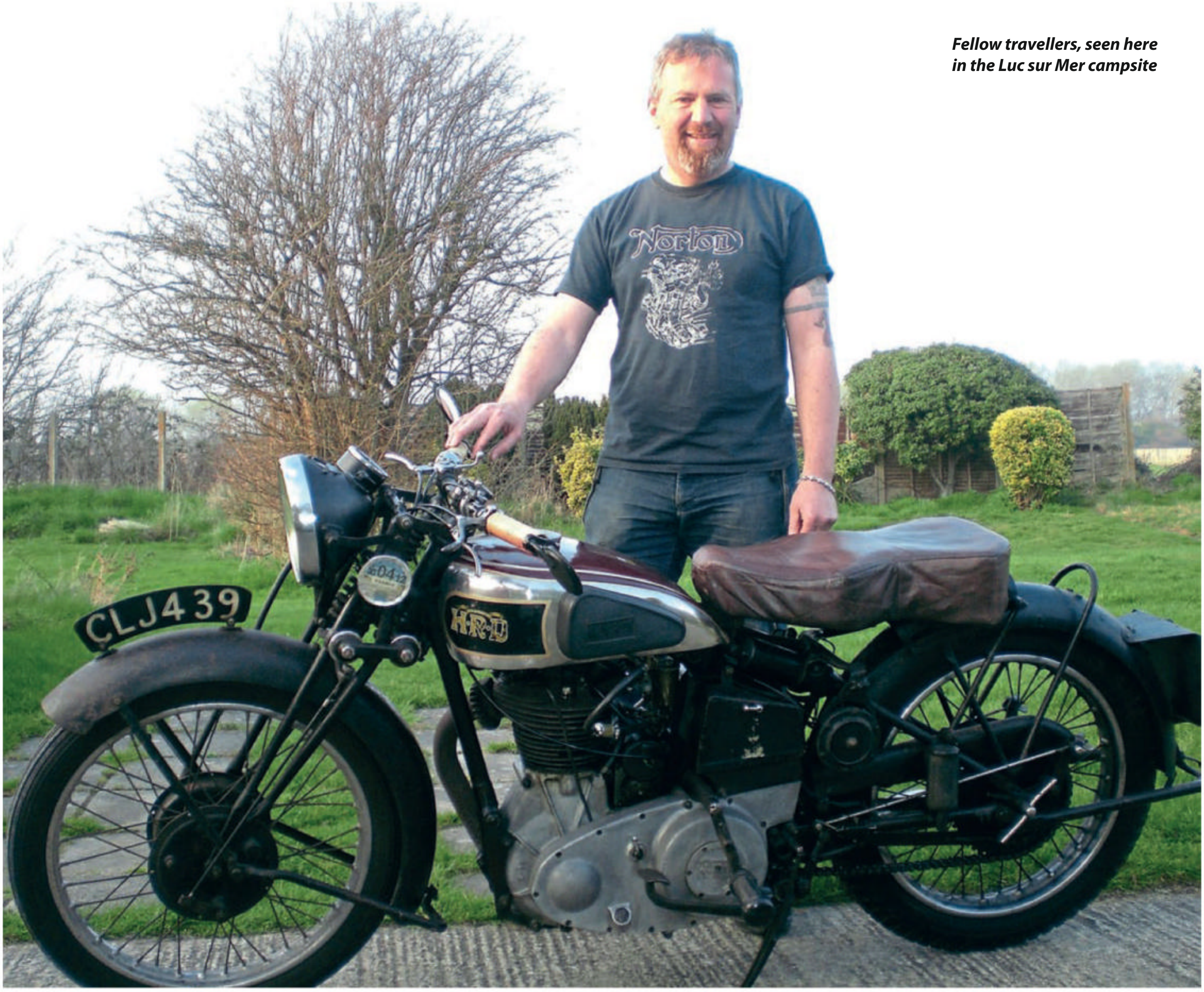
Assembly

Crankcase by Atkins Head by Atkins Erected by Atkins



The supplying dealer…

Left: The factory order. Not something you see every day



Fellow travellers, seen here in the Luc sur Mer campsite

A sturdy front end, complete with a brake which actually works

tighten the fixing bolt but it was already tight! The casting was loose on the threaded boss, so I stripped the carb in front of a French audience. Lynne went into the hypermarket and came out with some five-minute Araldite which I used on the float bowl casting, and then waited half an hour before the final tightening of the bolt.

Ready to go after tightening: turn on petrol with fingers crossed, no leaks! I started the bike to applause from the crowd. We made it to the rally, did all the rides and home again with no problems. Eventually a newly manufactured 15-degree replacement turned up, three or four months later. The roadside bodge was still OK, so that's a big thumbs-up to five-minute Araldite.

In our opinion, our French adventures on many different bikes have been quite different to UK outings. The French are much more biker-friendly than the British public. We have experienced many friendly chats when pulling up in France. If you have ever left the Le Mans 24 hour on a bike, and witnessed the families cheering and clapping along the route home, then you will know what I mean.

When we first went to France on the HRD we were told that there was only one more example in the whole of France. Since then, we have seen another three French ones at various events, and there might be some more lurking in barns. However, we did see two new Series A twins that are French-built replicas, last year at the Velocette / Vincent Rally.

In 2012 we joined the Italia Day at Horsham. Lynne was taking her Super Alce and Pietro at Moto di Marino kindly let me attend on the HRD as a support vehicle. All the other bikes were Italian, so to blend in my mother-in-law made a tank cover for the HRD from an Italian flag. It did attract a lot of attention as not many people could work out what it was! There were lots of fantastic Italian bikes and cars; Ferraris, and Lamborghinis two a penny. Even the Horsham streets had turned Italian with lots of flags and bunting (and a sneaky HRD).

In general, the ride on this 1936 HRD Comet is very comfortable with its dual cantilever twin friction damper rear end and the dual seat. For a 1930s machine it is very advanced and rides more like a 50s bike. The steering from the Brampton

At the Arromanche viewpoint

girder central spring and damper front end is very good and has loosened up a bit from the first rides with some more miles under its wheels.

Another advanced aspect of the 1930s specification is the 7" double-sided duo brake drums on both wheels for balanced braking. I recently had the front ones skimmed and new linings fitted so they're even better. The four-speed foot-change Burman XBAPH gearbox is very positive, and the Comet has a light clutch action with a duplex primary chain. There's plenty of torque from the 500cc 'semi ohc' engine.

Fuel consumption is good from the Amal pre-monobloc (now that I've fixed the leak). The petrol tank has a 3¼ gallon capacity and is made of stainless steel, built to last. The exhaust is a low-level type with a nice note which is not too loud. Placing the bike on the rear stand is an effort, but there is a sidestand also fitted. No tools are needed to remove the rear wheel – a useful feature.

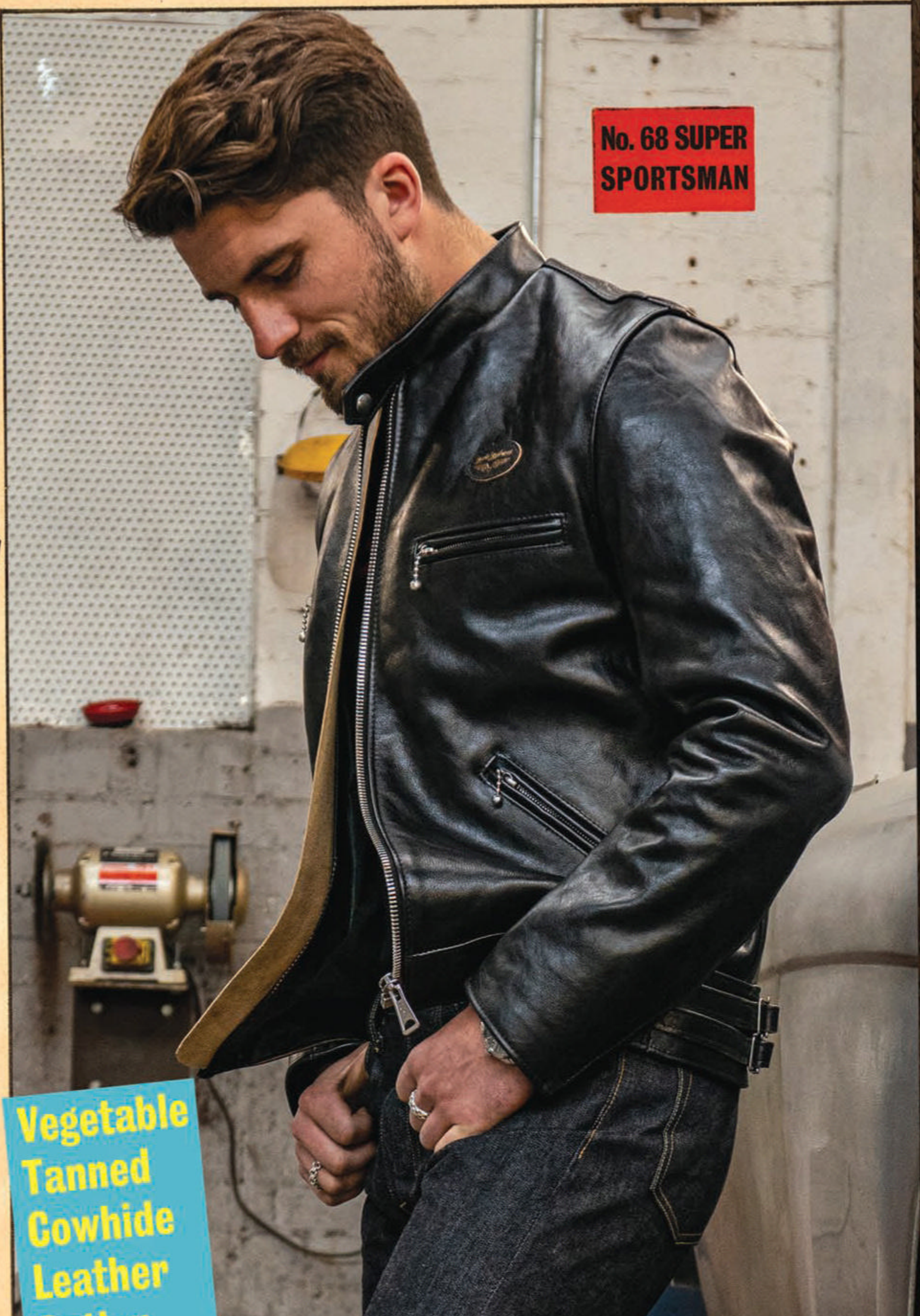
Starting the Comet requires practice and I have found it easier to do sitting astride the bike. Firstly I free the clutch, turn on both petrol taps and a small tickle on the carb. Set the advance / retard lever to a set position that I am happy with (or it can really bite) and then bring the bike up to compression. Choke on, decompressor in, turning the engine over to prime, then out and bringing back up to compression. Decompressor back in to move just past compression and… kick start with a full swing. It usually starts good from cold, then full advance and ease the choke off. Hot starting follows the same procedure with a small tickle on carb and no choke. I have had quite a few first-kick starts, even in front of an audience, which is great when it happens.

The bike has now covered 26,044 miles which is good for the old girl, especially as I have other bikes to ride. To own, ride and maintain this rare machine is a great privilege. RC

CLJ439
GDL 963
Royal Enfield

LEWIS LEATHERS

No. 1141
Week-ending
Saturday
21 October
1969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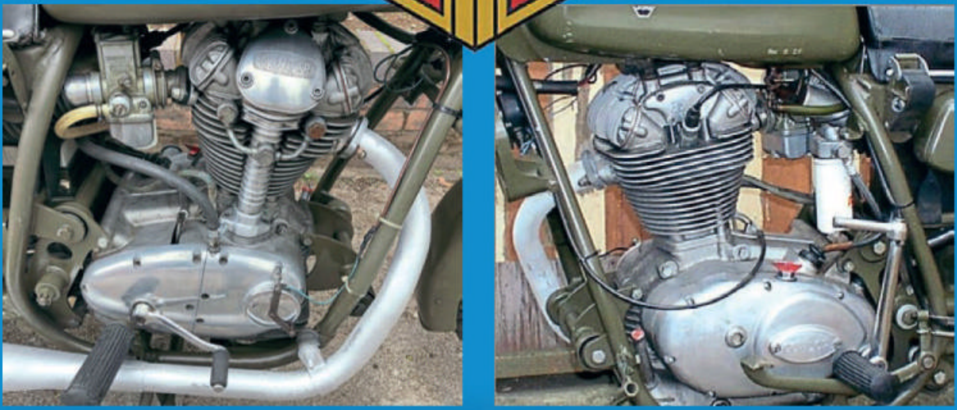


The Condor's single cylinder ohc engine is a derivation of the Ducati motor which first powered the Italian company's lightweight scrambler in the mid-1960s. In its Condor form, the 350 engine outputs just under 17bhp, giving the army bike a potential top speed of 70mph

EURO-STAR

Built in Switzerland, based around an Italian engine and subsequently adopted by the Spanish. Mark Holyoake enjoys a continental Condor moment…

Photos by Mark Holyoake / Paul Miles / RC RChive

Mark's Condor has been decently civilianised

I was looking for a significantly lighter and smaller machine than some classics I have enjoyed, like the 1970s BMW flat twins or Harley-Davidson Sportsters. It needed to be engaging and perhaps a little quirky, easy to start, equipped with handy and user-friendly stands, to be affordable and hopefully be able to hold its value. I pondered a Morini 350 but my preferred Strada with wire wheels failed the 'affordable' test. An experience with a swinging arm BSA B31/33 ruled out these machines; the last one I owned was fitted with a centrestand designed by the devil.

I was considering an Aermacchi SS350 as seen in RC219. The one at Venture Classics had a working electric start, the right weight and was quirky enough. I was almost ready to buy when I came across the bike that landed in the garage. A Condor A350, for £3200.

This is a Swiss military model. The Swiss obtained the 350cc engine from Ducati and fitted it into their rubber-mounted frame with cycle parts from Marzocchi, Koni and using drum brakes that appear similar to those on machines like my earlier Guzzi NF500 (although they have appreciably less weight to stop with the Condor). The first Swiss bikes in 1973 were fitted with Italian-made engines but when Ducati turned away from the single in 1974 they swapped to the Mototrans Spanish version.

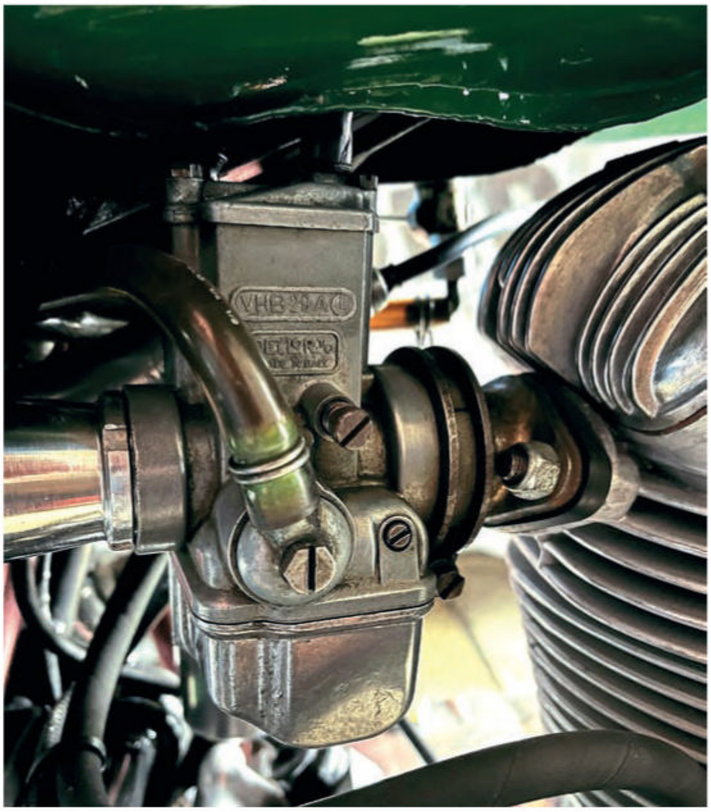
That Spanish version was afflicted by some mythical stories leading to the '24 Horrors' nickname after a buyer in the long distant past struggled with a '24 Horos' model. It was a great story at the time and a good pun, so became established folklore. Mick Walker may have mentioned less robust cams and rockers, but these are easily replaced with Italian components. Memory tells me that a Walker version with modified cams and rockers was absolutely fine on the race track, with maybe a 5mph top speed deficit to the Ducati Mach1. Mototrans went on to make versions of the single for some time into the 1980s.

➤

It's a practical classic, too

MILITARY MITE

Probably the most practical – and rugged! – version of all Ducati-base singles is the original military Condor. Around 3000 A350s were manufactured between 1973 and 1978



The higher-compression Ducati engine used a 29mm Dell'Orto carb, while the Condor swapped to a 27mm item – possibly useful in these days of fuel shortages!

Bellinzona
60
80
40
40557
100
20
120
0
140
CONDOR
km/h

The main switch is very similar to some BMW and MZ types

Back to my Condor, which has the Italian engine. A previous owner had been dabbling. Although it's still green, the colour is not quite as military standard. It also has lower than standard handlebars, a different seat with longitudinal springs like the 1950s BMW, and the shocks aren't the original Koni but they work fine. Together the saddle and those handlebars – which are slightly higher than flats – result in a comfortable position.

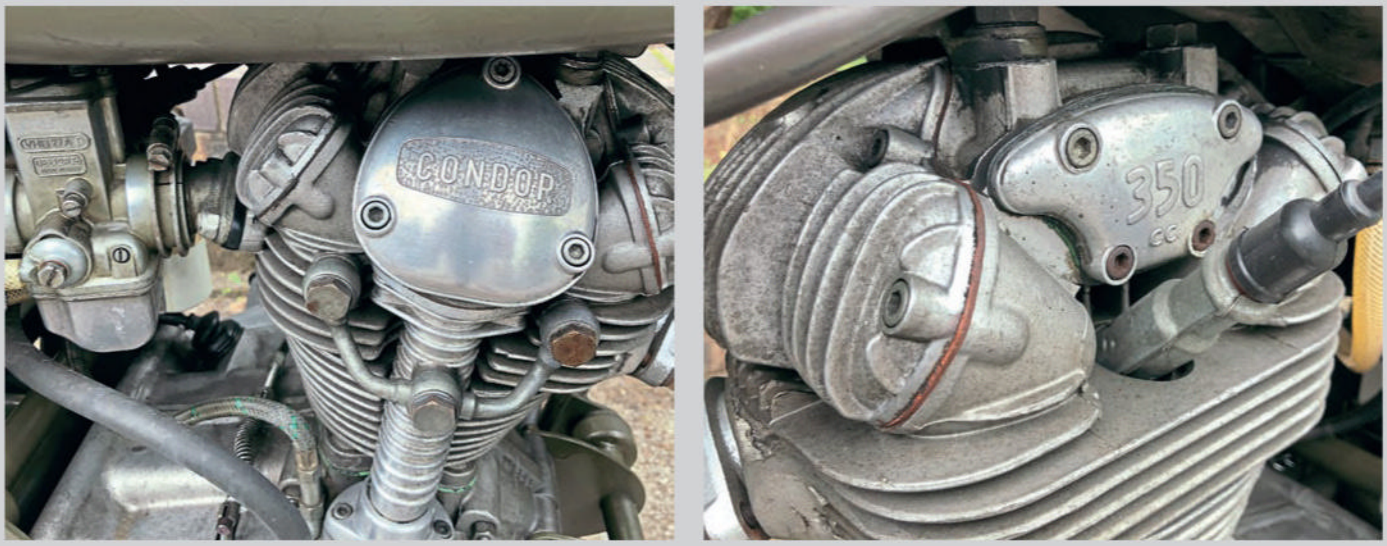
Internally, I understand that the engine has been fitted with a Ducati scrambler cam and is fed by a 29" square carb rather than the Condor's 27" version. My bike also wears a functioning valve lifter (as fitted to Italian 350/450 singles), a silencer, sidestand and a pannier which entirely suits its current guise.

I had some trepidation about the points, but so far it starts easily with the left-side kickstart when you're standing alongside it. My fears about struggling with starting are beginning to recede…

Unlike its Ducati counterpart, the Condor isn't a lithe and flickable sportster. But with its engine in this state of tune it certainly isn't a slouch. It reminds me of the Morini 350 Strada. It doesn't feel frantic cruising on A-roads or more minor lanes. The spread of power and its happiness to tootle about at 30mph and be comfortable on the 55-65mph range is quite engaging.

The Condor goes round corners quite satisfactorily, too. Apart from the rubber mounting, the frame is conventional, as are the telescopic forks and shocks. It negotiates corners and bumpy fenland roads when I ask it to.

Fuel consumption is around 65-75mpg. The fuel cap is easy to operate, even when wearing gloves, and its operation, like much of the bike, displays the military heritage and the design for longevity and usability rather than civilian 'sporty' aims. The Condor feels similar in its build quality and sense of purpose to the Moto Guzzi NF500, but the A350 is much lighter and more sprightly. Like the Guzzi there is no unwanted mechanical noise from the engine or gearbox. The gearbox



Condor went to the expense of fitting properly branded engine covers. No one was fooled. Engine production switched from the Ducati home factory to the Spanish Mototrans plant in 1974

Back in 2019, Ace Tester Miles delivered his own verdict on the Condor. For the full background to the model, dig out RC177 and settle down for a right good read

on the Condor seems delightful with well-spaced gears for its state of tune.

It's not as glam as the Ducati Desmo Mk3, but has similar performance when the engine has been tweaked like mine. The Condor also has some worthwhile changes from its Italian / Spanish forefathers: an oil filter and more robust silencer fittings. My bike came with the original silencer as a spare, but wears the pipes from the Italian version. Combined with the rubber mountings it makes for a very civilised and smooth ride. This silencer does generate a more vocal soundtrack than I expect the original would, but it's pleasant and not over the top.

It must be my age, but I prefer spoked wheels to Comstar or cast wheels of later times. Maybe these robust spoked wheels were considered more durable for military use. The drum brakes do their job admirably and with no trauma.

The electrics seem to be a mix of Italian and 1950s-type BMW style. That may be a throwback to the earlier Condor 250, which was propelled by an R26 lookalike engine. Certainly the headlamp ignition switch is familiar to anyone used to a BMW of that age.

The A350 has a small, dedicated band of followers who appreciate the rugged, simplistic and comfortable progress that it provides. I gather that the standard military version is little less powerful and more sedate – perfect perhaps for mountain passes on patrol when they were in service. I suspect lower power and less stress also made for longer lasting engines. My version is a bit more stressed, but nothing like a super-sporty desmo Ducati.

All in all, this Swiss machine has filled the void. It answers my current needs for something smaller, engaging and quirky. It would be nice to compare it one day to an Aermacchi SS350, but for now I'm enjoying my Condor moment. RC

THINKING OF BUYING?

If you're in the market for a Condor then you may need to exercise patience and be prepared to compromise, because there aren't too many for sale at any particular time. The one seen here sold at auction during lockdown for £2800, was UK registered and came with stacks of original kit

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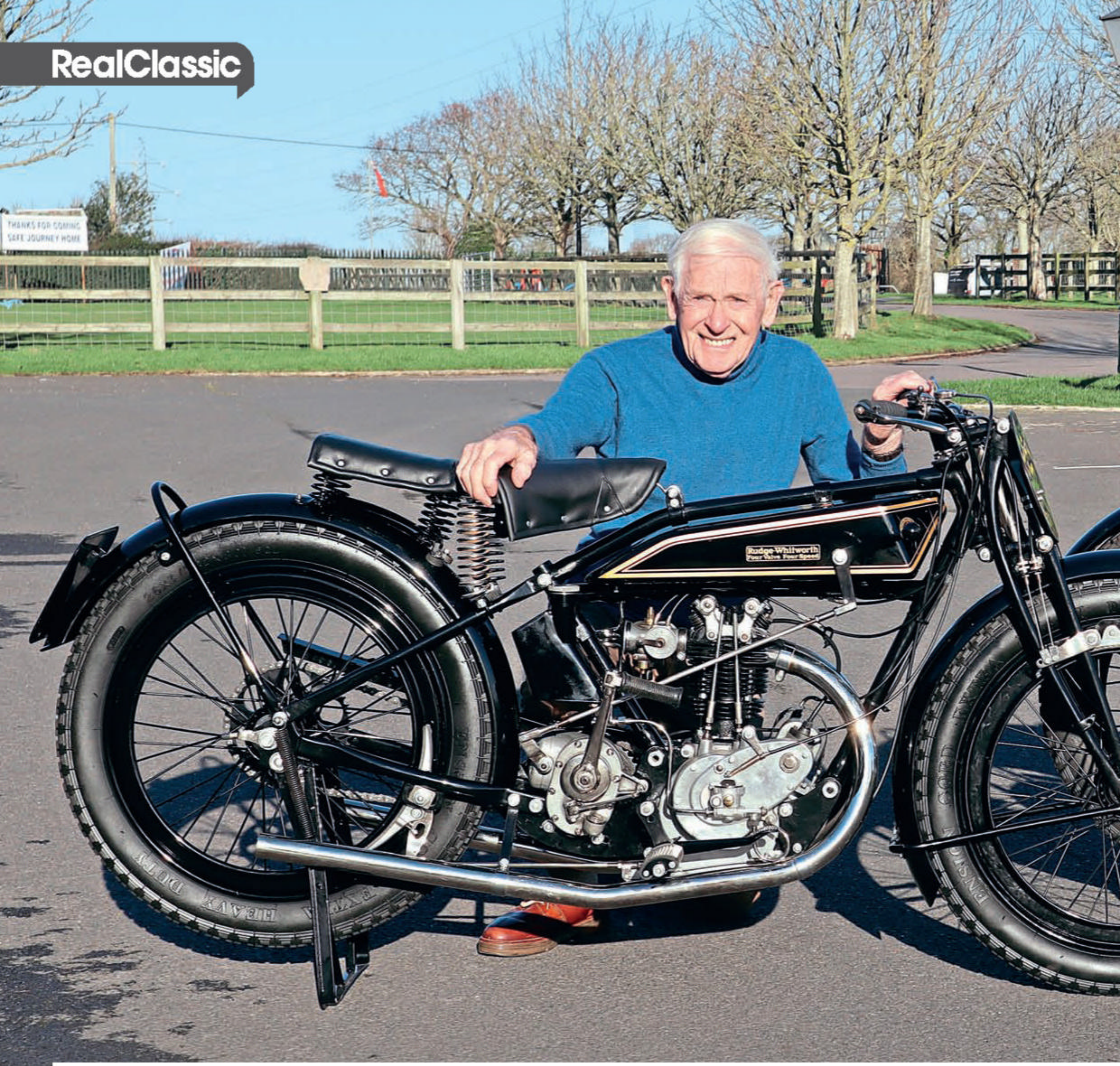


FOUR BY FOUR

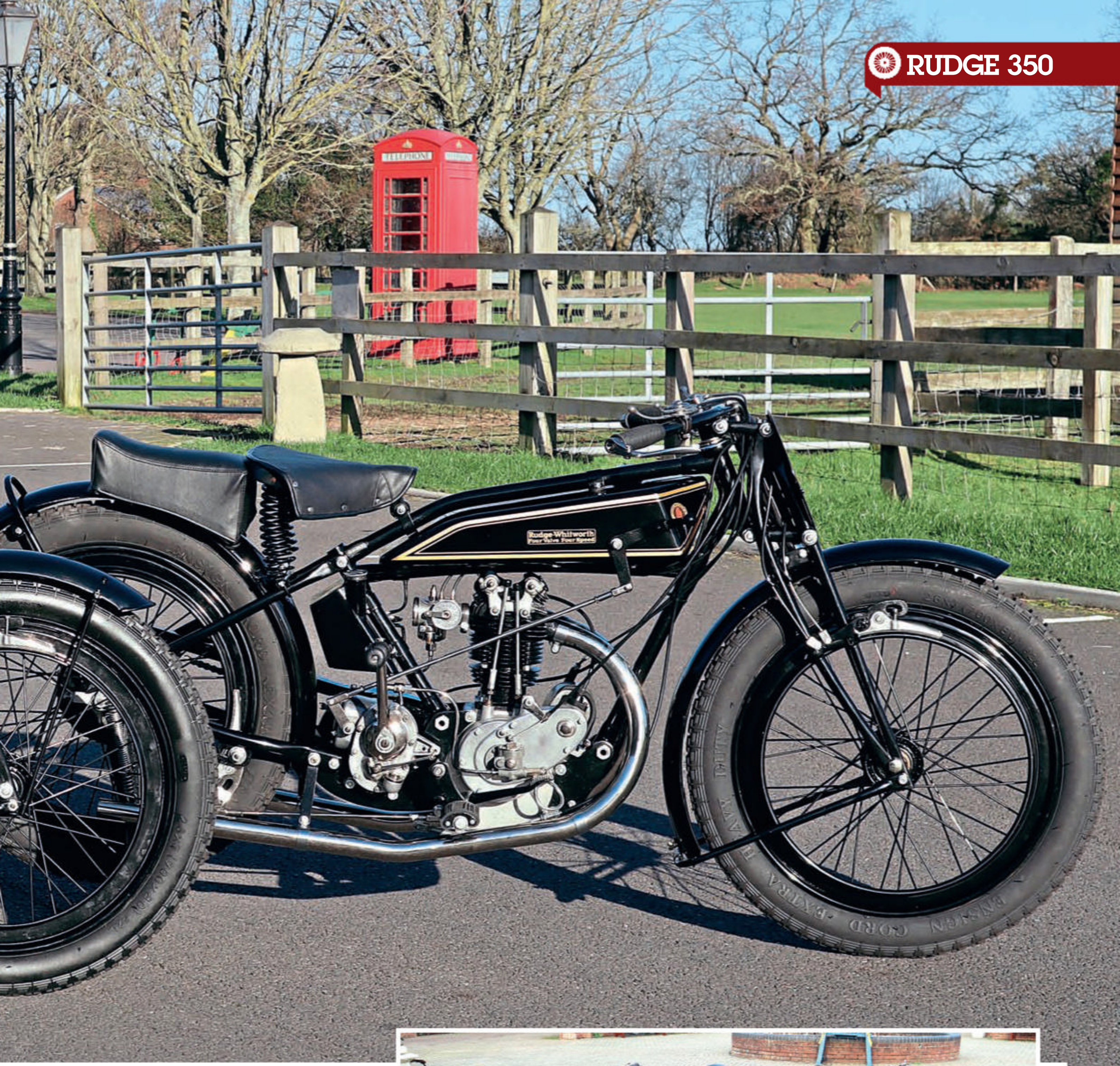
Nope, not four bikes nor four cylinders. A pair of singles, in fact, boasting ground-breaking engineering from nigh-on a century ago. Rowena Hoseason reports…

Photos by the Miller Museum / RC RChive

The Sammy Miller Museum recently acquired this pair of Rudge-Whitworth four-valve, four-speed 350s which date from the mid-1920s. They were bought by the museum from one of their regular visitors, Alan, who wanted his motorcycles to go to a good home now that he's no longer able to actively enjoy them.

When it was launched in the 1920s, Rudge claimed that their Four was 'a thoroughbred… It is a single conception, designed and built from the raw material upwards in our own factories, and it embodies the lessons learned in 17 years of motorcycle construction.' Initially available as a 70mm x 90mm 350 in 1924, and then joined by an 85 x 88mm 500 in the following year, the ohv single cylinder machines revitalised the firm's fortunes. Four gears were unusual enough on a motorcycle in those days: four valves were almost unheard of.

The firm's development engineer, George Hack, followed principles established by the high-performance aircraft engines of the time and specified four 'Celerity' valves. Multiple valves could be lighter and stronger than larger ones,

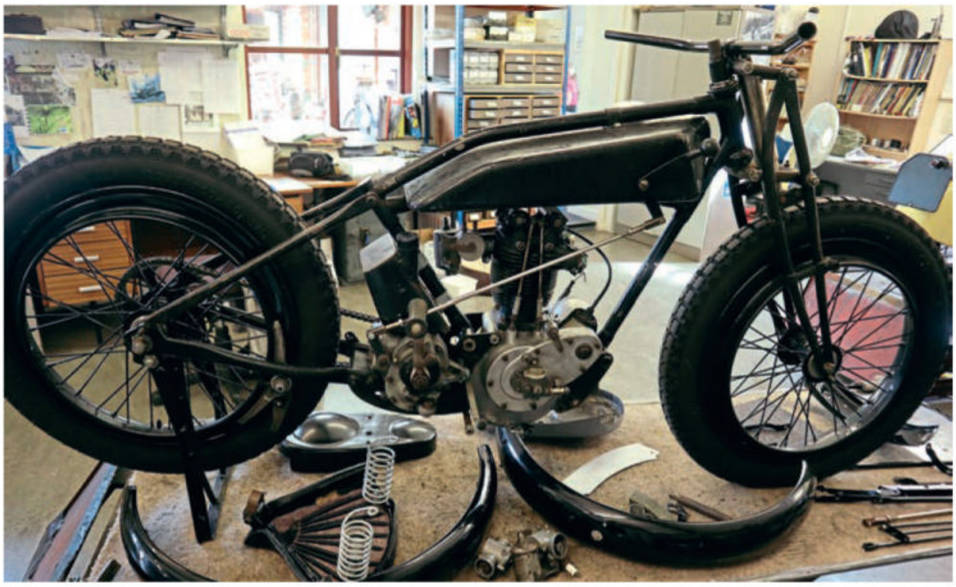


so they'd run cooler, rev more freely and avoid valve float. Hack also positioned the spark plug in the middle of the cylinder head, maximising efficient combustion with a short flame path. 'The rockers and cam profiles have been designed to avoid the necessity of enormously strong valve springs, thus reducing stress,' explained the technical specification. Splayed ports permitted extensive finning and free airflow around the parallel valves.

Hack went on to develop the layout over the following 15 years with semi and full radial valve arrangements, seeking the best possible format to achieve reliability in a high-performance pushrod engine. The four-valve top end certainly proved to be one of the innovations which set Rudge motorcycles apart from the common herd, although it wasn't initially easy for competitive riders to fully realise the potential of the Hack's innovative engineering.

At first glance, it's not easy to tell the two machines apart. Closer examination reveals that one of them is registered for the road…

It all paid off in 1928 when Graham Walker's works 500 became the first motorcycle to win a road race at an average speed above 80mph. That victory at the ➤



One of the Rudges on the bench

Ulster Grand Prix inevitably spawned a special model, which is how the super-sporting 500 Four became officially known as the Ulster.

Back with the 346cc Four, the firm claimed to have 'built the engine so sturdily that no ordinary wear or vibration could affect it for tens of thousands of miles... if you use the oil-can liberally and keep all nuts tight, you will have learned half the secret of reliability. The other half was built into your Rudge by the men who made it'.

Those men had recently swapped to fully automated lubrication by a Best & Lloyd pump, avoiding issues with manual over-oiling or lubrication starvation. The rider was reassured that optimal oiling was being achieved – even though the evidence was hidden from his eyes – thanks to a 'Tell-Tale.' The manual explained that 'the pulsations of the Tell-Tale when the engine is running indicate that the pump is working correctly.'

Ignition was by BT-H magneto or a Maglita for those with electric illuminations. Transmission was all-chain from Rudge's own four-speed, helical-gear gearbox, while braking came courtesy of another Rudge innovation – their dummy-rim belt system which linked the front and rear brakes to one pedal.

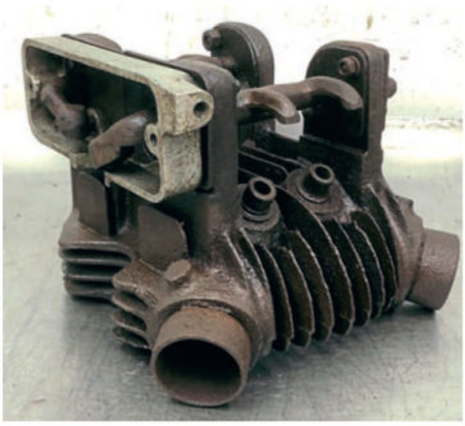
Rudge made much of the fact that their Four was designed as a whole, not simply cobbled together from proprietary parts. 'A motorcycle designed piecemeal, to include Tom's front forks, Dick's engine and Harry's gearbox may run well enough for a time,' they commented, 'but it cannot give the lasting service and utter reliability of a machine such as the Rudge Four, in which forks, steering, engine, gearbox and, above all, brakes are perfectly suited to their work and to each other.'

The roadgoing machine. The previous owner had 'made great progress on them…'

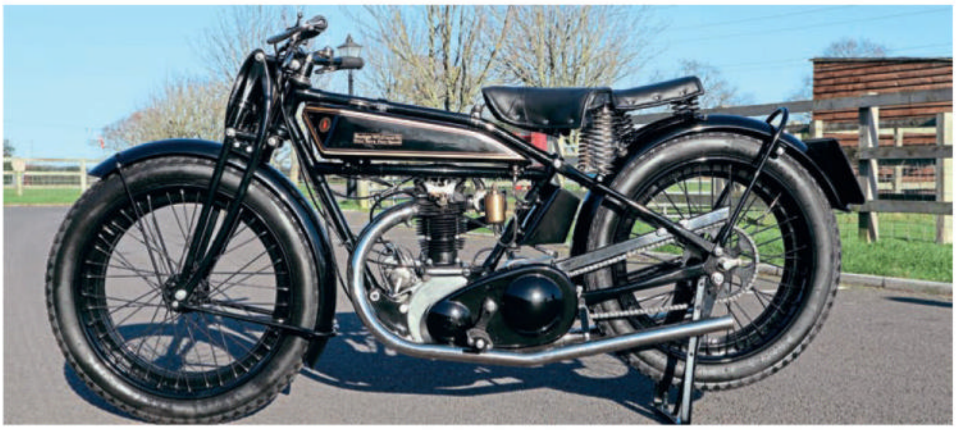
The Rudge Four of 1926 was available in three specifications: Special (costing £55), Standard (£50) and Sports (£60). The Special, with its variable front springing, high quality stove enamelling and polished exhaust and parts, was a compromise between the all-weather utility of the Standard and the 'ultra-performance' of the Sports. The Sports came with a removable compression plate to lift the ratio from 5.6 to 6.2 to 1, giving it an 80mph ultimate speed, as well as higher gearing, a Lycett Aero saddle, handlebars shaped for easy use when flat on the tank, a special exhaust and steering damper.

Rudge discouraged home-tuning the Four any further; 'You can't improve its output by fitting special pistons or by lightening its reciprocating parts' they said, and warned that major alterations might 'ruin its extraordinary thirst for revs by unbalancing it'. However, they were happy for owners to experiment with larger jets and carb choke, and guaranteed that the Sport would hit 80mph on a 50% benzol-petrol mix.

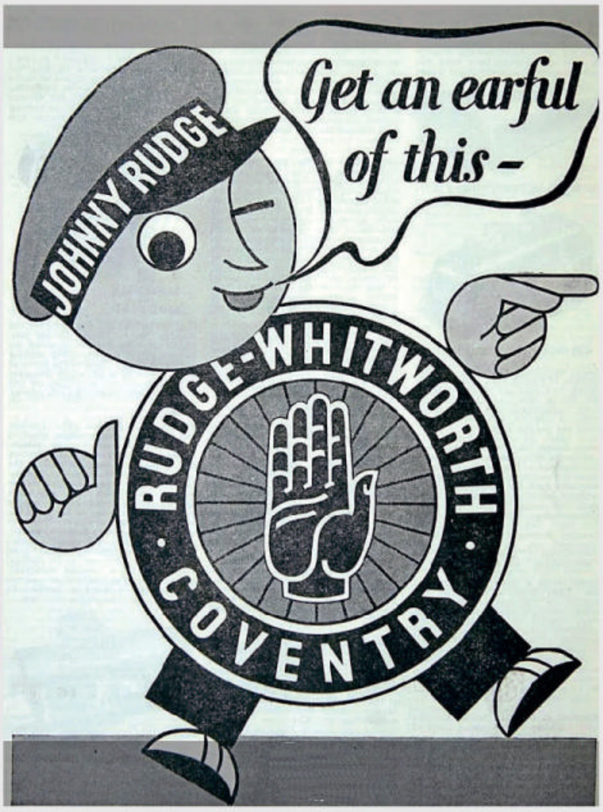
The 350 version of the Four was only

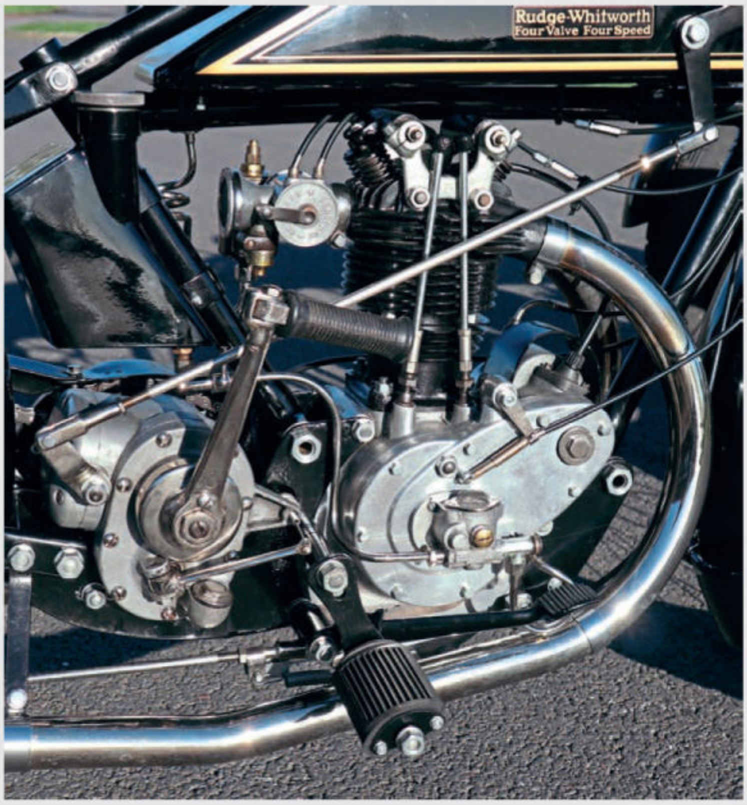


The secret of the Rudge Four was its 4-valve head



The Keeper. This machine has its documentation and will go on show





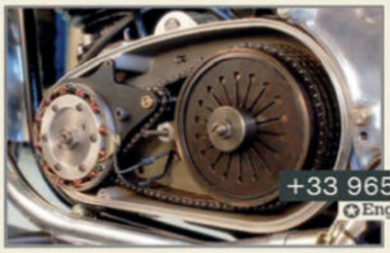
built for a couple of years before being discontinued; at just 20lb lighter than the 500 it was pleasant to ride if not exactly fast. The four ratios means that a decent speed could be maintained on hills, although it couldn't 'hold a candle to the sportier 350s of the period,' according to Titch Allen, who had ridden pretty much all of them. But the roadgoing Fours benefited from an extremely civilised ride: they were smooth, controlled and mechanically quiet for their time.

Titch Allen suggested that this model represented 'a milestone on the road of progress, a technological highway which has led to even more ratios and ever narrowing powerbands.' He commented that extracting the ultimate performance from a Four could be a challenge, making the Sports version 'a mount for men who are old in experience but young in heart.'

The bikes you see here had been given considerable attention by their previous owner, Alan, before they found their way to Sammy Miller's workshop. Apparently, 'the engine and gearbox were both in good condition as Alan had made great progress on them, including complete new valve gear. With the help of Mike Collingston from Rudge Spares, the rebuild went well. One bike had its V5 with matching numbers while the second one had no documentation, so this bike is being sold by the museum to help fund the restoration.

'Both ride extremely well and are very sporty. You can understand why and how Rudge were so successful in competition!' RC

The bonus bike, which will be sold to help fund the restoration of the other



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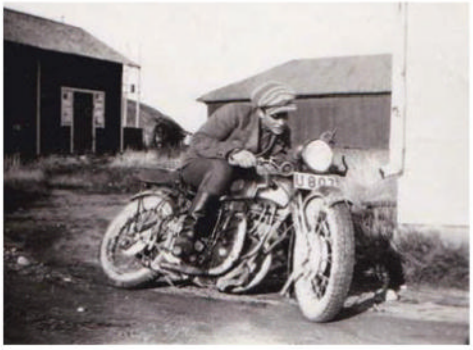

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SHOWSTOPPERS

Roll up, roll up! Rowena Hoseason takes you on a mystery tour…

Photos by Rowena Hoseason / RC RChive

Norton
RealClassic

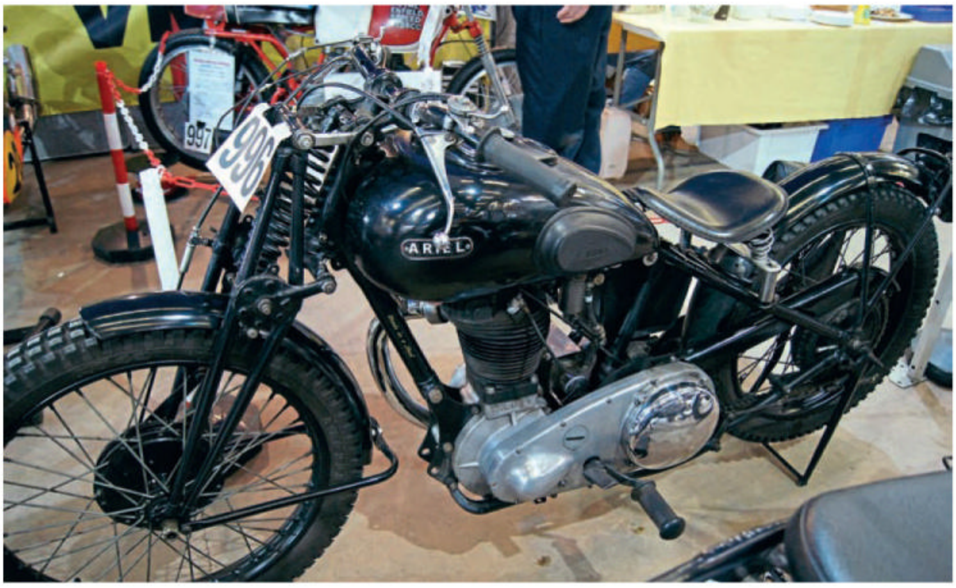
It was February and it was freezing, so it must've been the Bristol Classic MotorCycle Show at Shepton Mallet. We found ourselves condemned to the outer darkness in a distant shed which was quite challenging to find. So apologies to all those who didn't manage to locate the RC Roadshow… although, of course, if you were coming to renew your sub then you probably won't be reading this. Eek.

Anyway, the show itself was a bit like old times but – in keeping with so many things post-pandemic – actually felt like something quite different. We met up with many old friends and enjoyed perusing the bikes on familiar club stands, but were a tiny bit befuddled by the new layout with an extra club hall located on the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the galaxy. I'm guessing that a few of you didn't find that, either.

Also – hark! What's that racket? Conversations were abruptly truncated twice a day by the ear-splitting sound of a rotary motor being revved to atmospheric altitudes, as Brian Crighton fired up his latest creation, the CR700W. He and racing hero Trevor Nation were interviewed on stage twice each day in another crowd-pleasing innovation for this event.

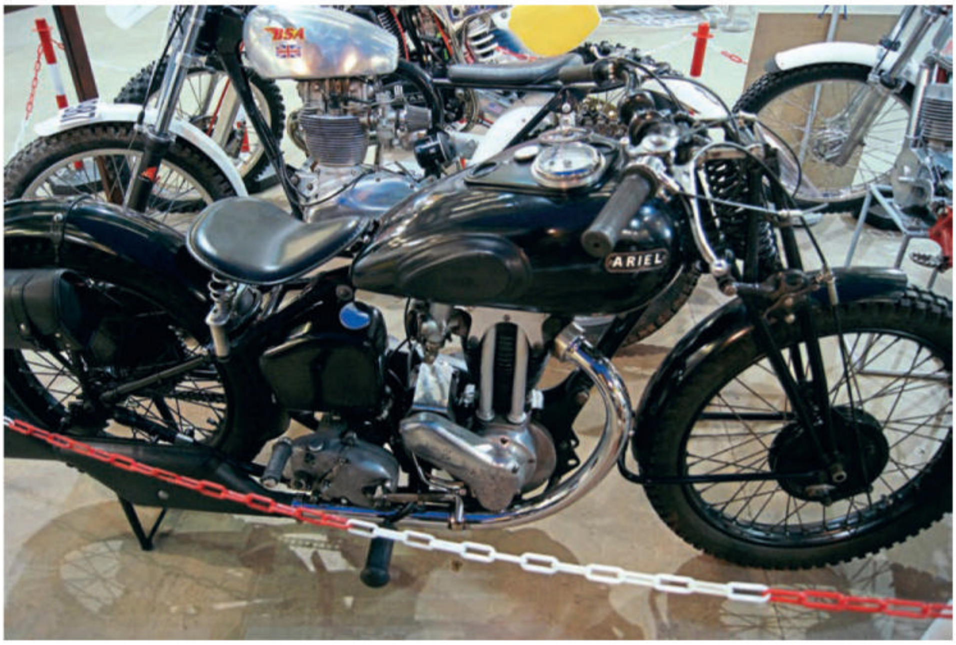
But just like in the beforetimes, the volume and variety of old bikes in the show was truly impressive. I've done my best to convey the flavour of the displays on these pages – one thing which hasn't changed is how many rarely-seen machines come out of the woodwork for Bristol, and how many of them are well-worn working bikes rather than primped and pimped chequebook restorations.

Although… if I may, I'd like to pass on a constructive criticism to anyone who puts a bike on display, and especially for organisers of club stands. You all go



to extensive lengths to arrange an array of interesting old motorcycles, so why not tell the public a little bit about each of them? Congrats to every owner and organiser who went to the trouble of supplying full details about each machine. But sadly many motorcycles were a mystery, with barely a hint about why they were on display or what the owner considered makes them something special. If you've gone to all the trouble to bring your P&J to the show, then why not take an extra two minutes to tell the crowds something about it?

Without further ado, onto those very motorcycles: the ones where I was able to ascertain something about the machine's background which I thought you might appreciate…



BITSA BOBBER

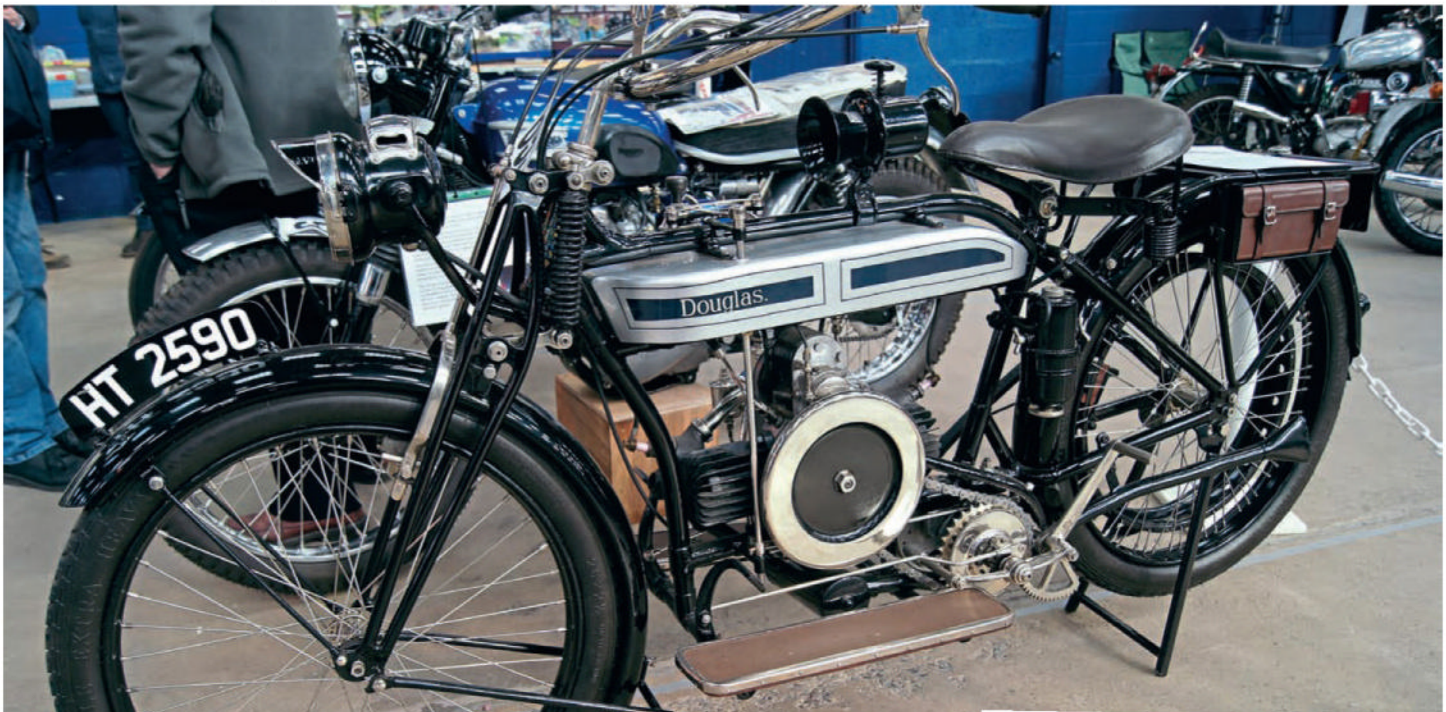
The VMCC Dorset section's stand was dedicated to specials, which meant I was entirely spoiled for choice. This 'Ariel Assortment' was just too tasty to ignore (and so were the chocolate brownies, thanks folks). It's the epitome of a practical classic: everything you need and nothing that you don't – well, provided you always intend to be home in time for tea!

'The Old Dripper' is a 500 Ariel, the major components of which left Selly Oak at different times before WW2. The engine started out in a 1936 NH 350 and gained the top end from a 500 of approximately the same age. They appear to be perfectly happy together, situation in a rigid / girders frame donated by a 1939 VB.

The current owner says it's a 'light and agile bike which is ideal for VMCC runs.' Getting it fettled was 'a really fun project. I didn't want a shiny, better-than-original bike that I was afraid to use, but something I can thrash about. It rides well and is oft admired.'

BLAST OFF!

The thorny problem of how to attract younger people into motorcycling in general – and point them towards a specific marque in particular – has been around for as long as I have. It's a recurring theme across the



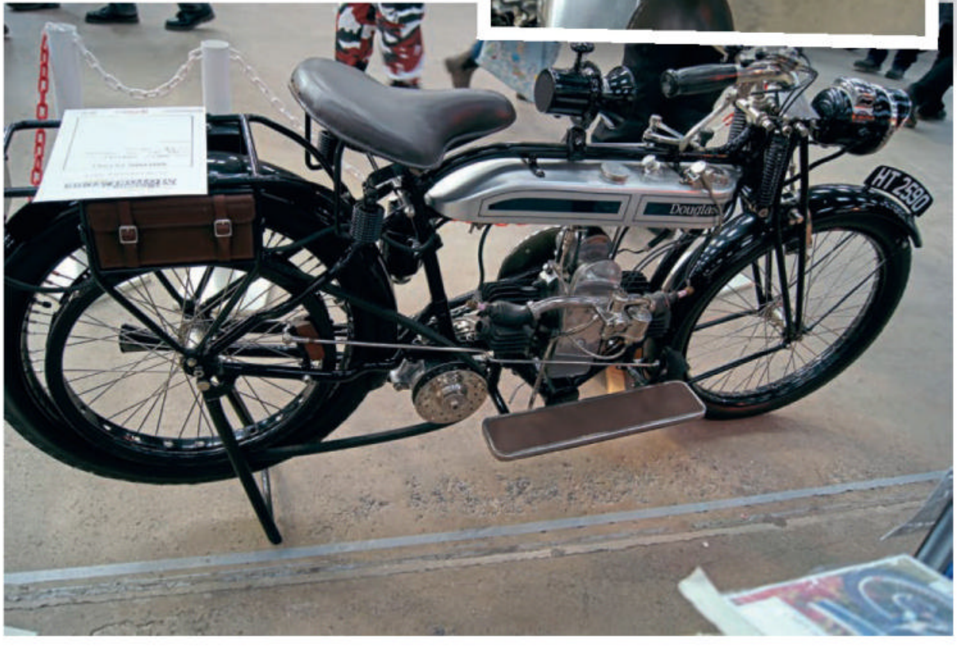
generations. Around two decades ago, Harley-Davidson came up with the cunning plan you see here. It's effectively half a Harley Sportster, badged as a Buell to reflect its slightly sporty specification. I give you the Buell Blast: a low cost, user-friendly, entry-level, single-cylinder roadster. Would it have seduced a 20-something you?

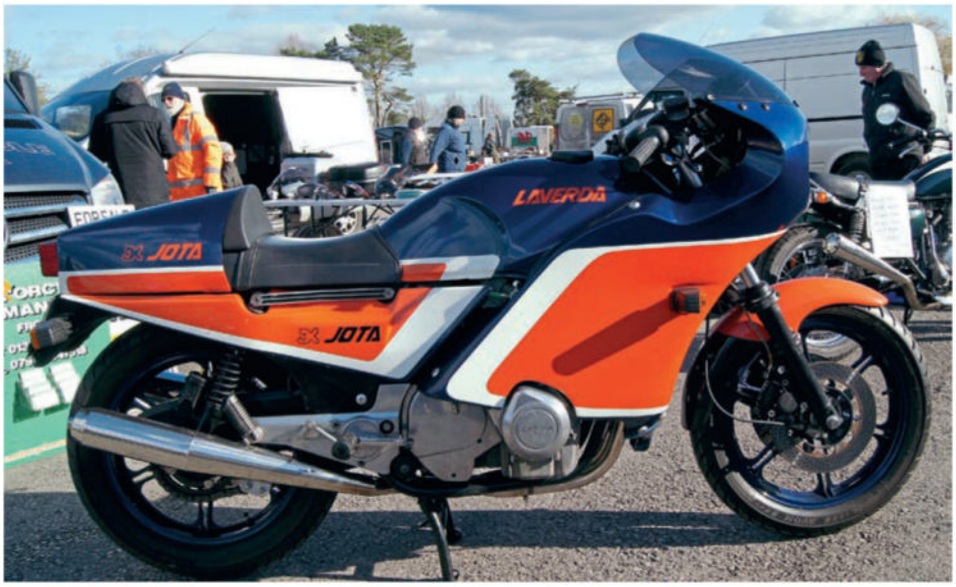
Intended for the American learner market, the 492cc single offers a ludicrously low seat height and all mod cons: disc brakes, belt drive, softly-set Showa suspension, electronic ignition, electric start, hydraulic tappets, mild cams, auto choke and near-bulletproof bodywork, with 34bhp to propel its 165kg mass. Apparently there are only eight of the little blighters currently registered in the UK. This one was up for grabs at £2500 and Frank would've snapped it up if he had space in The Shed…

LOCAL HERO

Despite the Great War raging on mainland Europe, Douglas produced a full range of motorcycles for 1915, including six variations on their fore-and-aft 2¾hp 350. 'The best twin' as they described it could be specified as a two- or three-speed roadster without a clutch, a similar two- or three-speed tourer (higher bar, footboards), or a three-speed version with a clutch, or one with an open-section frame specifically intended for the ladies' market. All were slim and blessed with a low centre of gravity, which rapidly endeared them to the war effort; the Douglas could even be manhandled out of the worst shell holes.

Ever practical, Douglas allowed for a heating pipe to be attached between the rear inlet manifold and the Amac carb's hollow jacket to avoid icing in cold weather. There wasn't a lot of scope for significant development given the war footing, but the Bristol firm had recently beefed up the wheel rims, improved the mudguards, converted the rear stand to swivel through a brazed lug,





added a new tubular carrier and experimented with a different rear brake. Bosch magnetos weren't available at the time so most machines were equipped with a Thomson Bennett item.

'So successful have our productions been during 1914,' claimed Douglas, 'covering themselves with glory in the hands of the naval and military authorities at the front, that we have found it unnecessary to make drastic alterations for this season.'

This 348cc edition was one of the last civilian models to leave the Douglas factory in 1917, before production was claimed entirely by the Ministry of Munitions. You'll notice that it comes equipped with a kickstart lever, unlike some of the less prestigious machines in the range. They would be pushed or paddled away with minimal effort using the valve lifter – just drop the valves once you reach a brisk walk.

'For a small sidevalve,' said Titch Allen when he rode a similar machine, 'it has nippy acceleration. Being a flat-twin there is no vibration and the pattering of the exhaust soon turns into a cheerful purr. It has a useful range between 25 and 35mph, when the Duggie will fly up mainroad hills.'

TRIPLE TREAT

It's the early 1980s. Laverda's thrilling triple has evolved from its outright outrageous 180-degree early incarnation into the smoother – dare we say somewhat sophisticated? – Jota 120. At the top of the range sat the faired RGS 1000; the ideal machine for crossing continents or popping to the shops… if the shops happen to be in John O'Groats, that is. The Jota achieved its performance potential as a high-speed sports-tourer, making more of its c85bhp than the Japanese opposition could accomplish with an extra cylinder and forty more horses.

However, the RGS did not come cheap. And in the UK, although the weather protection offered by the fairing was appreciated, the price tag was not. So to please the importer the RGA was created, incorporating a smaller headlamp fairing. With a few other cost-saving tweaks its purchase price was reduced by hundreds of pounds, and it was marginally lighter than that RGS.

At this point you may be looking at the photos and feeling fairly bemused, because the bike you're looking at clearly has the smoothly-sculptured flanks of a sleek sportster. Yes indeed, by 1985 importer Three Cross Motorcycles were converting RGAs back into fully-faired special editions complete with bespoke bodywork, an 'optimised' exhaust system, low bars and rearset footrests.

These changes kept the Sprint's mass close to the 540lb of the standard RGA, and meant it could easily exceed 130mph without battering the rider to bits. Power oozed from the 981cc dohc engine from as low as 2000rpm, and the three-cylinder beast would comfortably cruise at 90mph with five grand on the rev counter. Triple 280mm Brembo discs provided more than enough stopping power – although the mass at the front of the machine and the dynamics of weight transfer during hard braking meant that the back wheel could lock if the rider wasn't paying adequate attention. Handling? As exquisite as you'd expect from the Marzocchi suspension and Jota frame – with an experienced pilot at the helm. Not the sort of bike to throw around with wild abandon, however.

This particular example was up for sale at Shepton, at a sniff under £10k. It's travelled 45,000km in four decades and comes with all its original parts. In theory you could return it to standard RGA spec: but why would you?

LEADING LIGHTWEIGHT

Call me superficial, but there's something about bright shiny objects that's almost irresistible. Naturally, then, I was stopped in my tracks by the blinding bling on the South Wales Sunbeam MCC stand – although the chrome panels on the petrol tank of the object of my desire did make it particularly problematic to photograph!

So distracting was the shiny stuff that initially I failed to understand quite what I was looking at. With that practical fairing, Marzocchi forks, turn signals, adjustable rear suspension and baggage capacity – as well

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ZÜNDAPP
KS 80

as the generous proportions of the pilot's compartment – I thought it was a probably a neatly-proportioned 350, maybe even a 500.

But no. Prepare to be amazed by the awesomeness that is the Zündapp KS80, a super-super moped of 80cc which was rumoured to exceed speeds of 80kph. This 1981 edition would've been legal for German 16 year-olds to ride, and was apparently considered the class-leader of its kind – not just in terms of equipment and performance, but also price. Even so, more than 6000 were made in Super, Sport and (you have to love the logic of the nomenclature) Super Sport specifications.

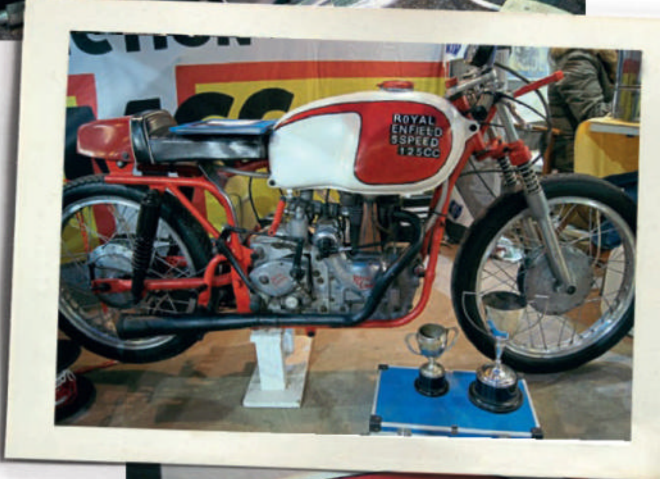
In theory, this class of two-wheeler was introduced to reduce 'the noise of small motorcycles and subjective annoyance' but it also gave German manufacturers a new niche in their home market. Enter the 8.5bhp KS80; a quality product which weighed only 105kg yet could carry 300kg – perfect for the unusually affluent teenager and his liebling and all their luggage. And perhaps a pet.

Possibly also perfect for older riders looking for something sprightly which stands out from the herd!

QUICK TRICK RACE-TRACKER

What do you call a Royal Enfield engine with a Triumph top end that's been slotted into a Gilera chassis? An Enfumphera, maybe? It's certainly a truly cunning combination of components which date from the 1940s and 50s, and which has evolved over time and a long career in competitive racing.

Built by the Light family from Gillingham, the Gilera Special was raced at Blandford Camp by Alan Light with a 150cc Royal Enfield engine. Then it morphed into a 125, and these days is powered by a 250 motor which has been fitted with the top end from a Tiger Cub. The original Albion gearbox was upgraded


ROYAL
ENFIELD
5SPEED
125CC

ROYAL
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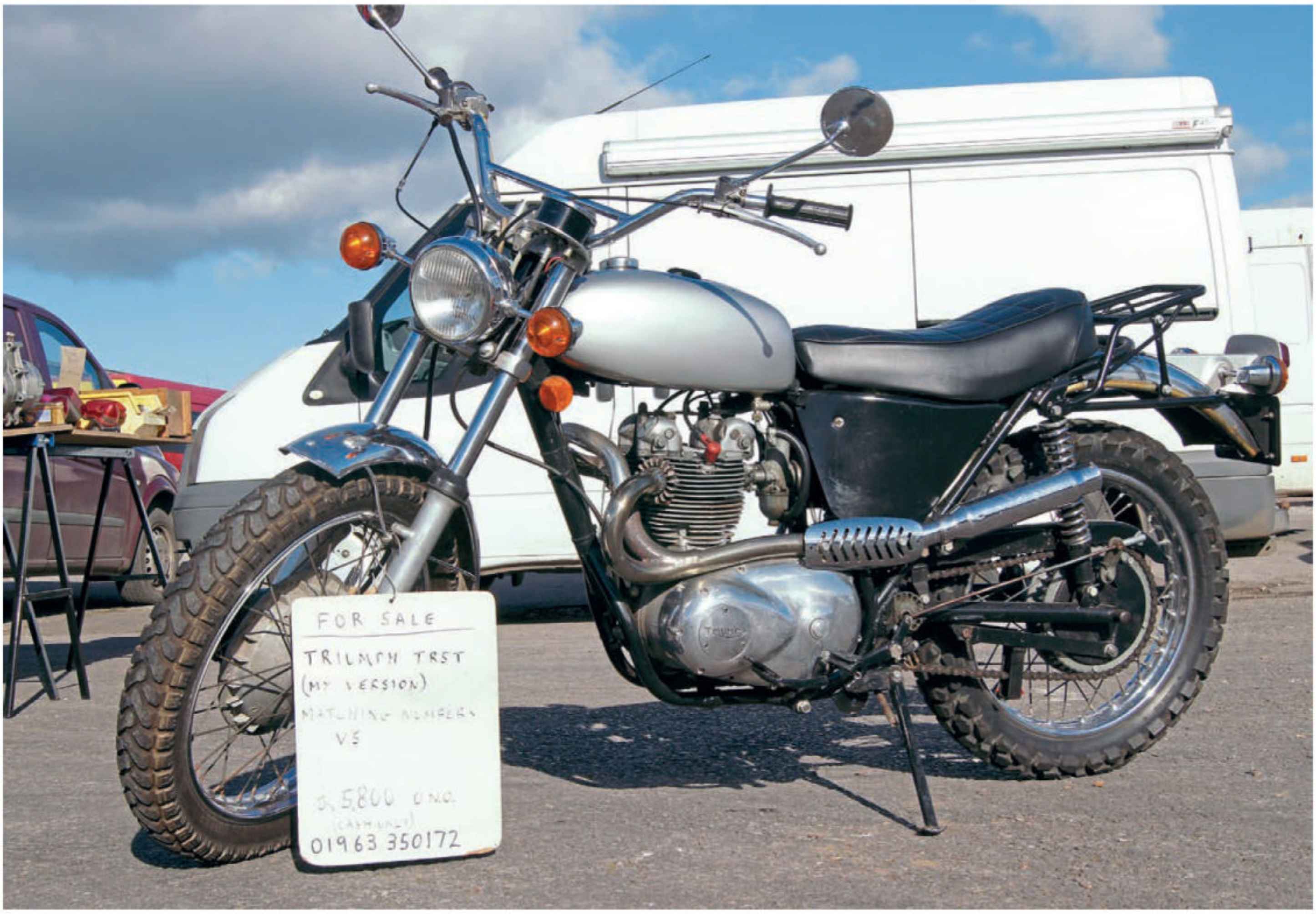

from its standard four ratios to a five-speeder. And as you can see from the trophies and awards, it's been really rather successful.

TOTAL TRIUMPH

Possibly the best parts-bin special of all time, the TR5T was a mongrel mix of 1970s BSA and Triumph middleweights which used the single-carb twin-cylinder engine from its T100C predecessor in the BSA oil-bearing frame. This inspired example of lateral thinking finally fulfilled the potential at which the B25 had hinted – and which the hard-to-start B50 didn't quite deliver. As a result, the TR5T is much-loved by many RC regulars for its pretty much spot-on combination of poise and performance.

In this guise, Triumph's unit construction 490cc twin output around 30 horsepower, running 9:1 compression and a 28mm Amal. The TR5T package included conical hub brakes, skinny Ceriani-type forks, B50 petrol tank, high-level competition mudguards, needle-roller swinging arm and snail-cam drive chain adjustment. At 320lb it was considerably chunkier than dedicated dirt bikes – but even so, six British riders aboard TR5Ts claimed three gold medals, one silver, and second place overall in the 1973 ISDT aboard TR5Ts. Not bad for a cobblejob of a bike, eh?

Motorcyclist magazine reckoned the Trophy Trail was 'a compromise' but 'the best-handling dual purpose machine available today.' Sadly it didn't survive the industry implosion of 1974, which means that 'MX' examples like this one can command a high price. As you'll see, that's £5800 in today's money… RC

THE SHOW GOES ON…

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BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY 10 APRIL

➤The Ashford CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE SHOW and bikejumble returns to Ashford Livestock Market, Ashford, Kent TN24 0HB. Star guest Dave Hughes, winner of the Senior Manx GP on a Matchless G50; meet the man and see the machine. Plus bikejumble and bikemart (sell your bike for free, just pay the usual admission fee), refreshments, garage clear-out stalls for just £15. Opens 10am, adult admission £6. elkpromotions.co.uk / 01797 344277

SATURDAY 15 APRIL

➤The GREAT NORTH JUMBLE starts 7am at North Yorks Events Centre, Scorton, DL10 6EJ. 07909 904705

SUNDAY 16 APRIL

➤The Salisbury Club host their Five Valleys charity MOTORCYCLE RUN. Starts at the Penruddocke Arms, Dinton at 11am (sign on from 9.30), travels c90 miles along Wiltshire and Dorset country roads. Refreshments at the start, pub lunch and tea stop in the afternoon. Open to non-members. salisburymotorcycleandlightcarclub.co.uk

SAT & SUN 22/23 APRIL

➤The CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE SHOW opens 9am at Staffs County Showground, ST18 0BD. Advance tickets £15. 01507 529529 / staffordclassicbikeshow.com

SATURDAY 29 APRIL

➤The REOC Home Counties ALL-MAKES AUTOJUMBLE opens 9.30am to 4pm at Yardley Gobion village hall NN12 7TW. Entry £4. Stalls £5 indoors or £10 for a van-sized outdoor pitch. Parking nearby, refreshments. All motorcycle spares welcome and you can sell complete bikes / projects outside. Contact Mark at trials59@yahoo.co.uk

SUNDAY 30 APRIL

➤The VMCC's RELAY RALLY takes place across the UK, riding between checkpoints set up by sections. vmcc.net

➤It's ROYAL ENFIELD DAY at the Sammy Miller Museum, New Milton, BH25 5SZ. sammymiller.co.uk / 01425 620777

BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY 1 MAY

➤The Wiltshire branch of the BSAOC host their Stone Circle custom and classic RIDE-IN SHOW. From 11am at Swindon Supermarine sports club, SN3 4BZ, entry £3. Bring your P&J and join the show! Large outdoor venue, easy bike parking (no cars please). Local traders, homemade refreshments, profits to charity

➤The Kent and Sussex Velocette club's annual MAYDAY MEET starts 9am at Hamstreet hall, south of Ashford in Kent. All motorcycles are welcome, refreshments, all profits to Air Ambulance. Veloseckent@gmail.com

SUNDAY 7 MAY

➤Romney Marsh CLASSIC BIKEJUMBLE includes a Ride-In Show at Hamstreet, near Ashford, Kent TN26 2JD. elkpromotions.co.uk / 01797 344277

➤There's an AUTOJUMBLE at the Sammy Miller Museum, New Milton, BH25 5SZ. sammymiller.co.uk / 01425 620777

➤The Stonham MOTORCYCLE SHOW opens 10am near Stowmarket IP14 6AT. stonhambarns.co.uk

SATURDAY 13 MAY

➤The LONDON CLASSIC BIKE SHOW opens 9.30am at Kempton Park racecourse, TW16 5AQ. 01507 529529 / kemptonautojumble.co.uk

SUNDAY 14 MAY

➤The Stratford AUTOJUMBLE opens 9.30am at Stratford Racecourse, CV37 9SE. 01507 529529 / stratfordautojumble.co.uk

WEDNESDAY 17 MAY

➤It's VMCC and NORTON DAY at the Sammy Miller Museum, New Milton, BH25 5SZ. sammymiller.co.uk / 01425 620777

SATURDAY 20 MAY

➤The GREAT NORTH JUMBLE starts 7am at North Yorks Events Centre, Scorton, DL10 6EJ. 07909 904705

➤Andover Norton host their OPEN DAY from 10am to 4pm. All visitors on any bike welcome to chat with the team and special guests from the old factory, at Wooler Park, SP10 5AZ. andover-norton.co.uk

WEDNESDAY 24 MAY

➤The National Motor Museum host a CLASSIC GRILLE get-together, 6.30pm to 8.30pm at Beaulieu, SO42 7ZN. Free entry but prebook only at beaulieu.co.uk

SUNDAY 28 MAY

➤It's BSA DAY at the Sammy Miller Museum, New Milton, BH25 5SZ. sammymiller.co.uk / 01425 620777

2-4 JUNE

➤The REOC's INTERNATIONAL ENFIELD RALLY is at Epidaurus in Greece, 75 miles from Athens. All RE owners welcome (nominal joining fee). More info andrew-pap@hotmail.com

SATURDAY 10 JUNE

➤The Clovelly MOTORBIKE SHOW opens 10am to 4pm at Clovelly Parish Hall near Bideford.

11-13 JUNE

➤The JUNE JAUNT covers 300 miles from Somerset across the Quantocks, Exmoor and Dartmoor. For bikes of 250cc or less, made before 1973. £315 fee includes hotels, dinners, back-up van. Russell@phaseone.co.uk / 01278 652439

16-19 JUNE

➤The Norton Owners Club NATIONAL RALLY is at Aberfoyle in Scotland. £30 for NOC members, non-members £42. nortonownersclub.org

SATURDAY 17 JUNE

➤The SCOTTISH CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE SHOW returns after a three-year hiatus to Ayr Racecourse, KA8 0JE. ayrclassicmc.com

➤The GREAT NORTH JUMBLE starts 7am at North Yorks Events Centre, Scorton, DL10 6EJ. 07909 904705

SUNDAY 18 JUNE

➤The VMCC's BANBURY RUN returns to the British Motor Museum at Gaydon, CV35 0BJ. banburyrun.co.uk

➤There's an ITALIAN BIKE RIDE-IN at the Sammy Miller Museum, New Milton, BH25 5SZ. sammymiller.co.uk / 01425 620777

WEDNESDAY 21 JUNE

➤The SOLSTICE BIKE NIGHT starts 6pm at the Dashwood Roadhouse, Piddington HP14 3BE. A classic and custom motorcycle which welcomes all riders. Plenty of parking, outside bar, hot food, trophies and live music. mrduke1@live.co.uk

➤The well-established SHINY BIKE NIGHT starts at 7.30pm at the Plough at Cadsden, Princes Risborough, HP27 0NB. Country setting, good food, beer and music. Raffle plus lots of prizes for classic bikes. bbcmcc.freeuk.com / 01494 868218

SUNDAY 25 JUNE

➤Romney Marsh CLASSIC BIKEJUMBLE includes a Ride-In Show at Hamstreet, near Ashford, Kent TN26 2JD. elkpromotions.co.uk / 01797 344277

➤Swaton VINTAGE DAY opens 10am at the showground on the B1394, NG34 0RF. Vintage and classic four- and two-wheelers plus many other country festival attractions. swatonvintageday.com

➤The Salisbury Club host their Horses & Henges Solstice MOTORCYCLE RUN in the Wiltshire area. Open to non-members. 07909 778685 / salisburymotorcycleandlightcarclub.co.uk

SAT & SUN 1/2 JULY

>The CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE & TRANSPORT SHOW offers steam trains and more in association with the Llangollen railway at Glyndyfrdwy Station near Corwen, LL21 9HF. bmpsnwales.org.uk / 07592 370572

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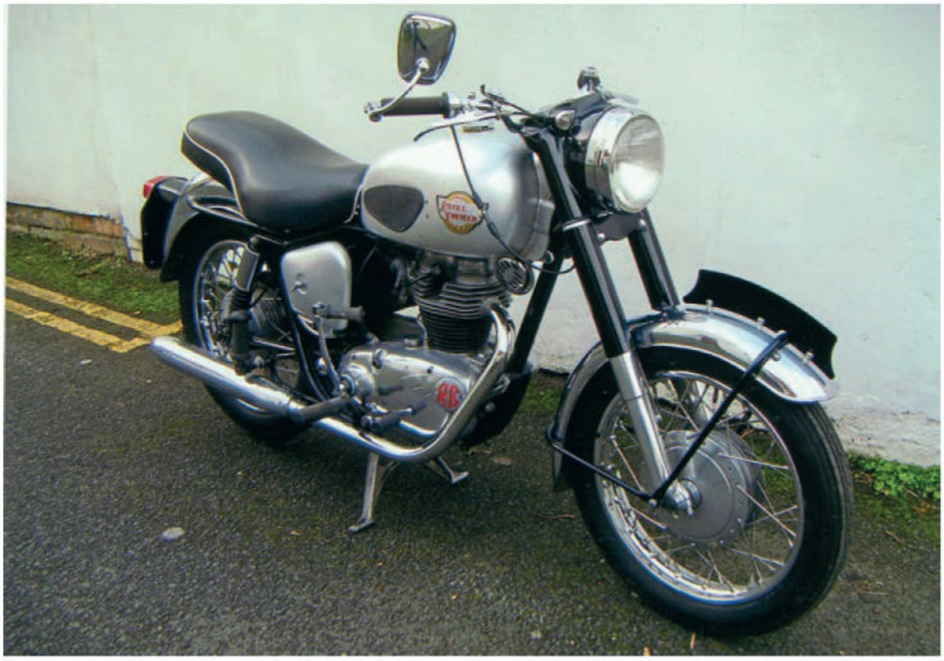
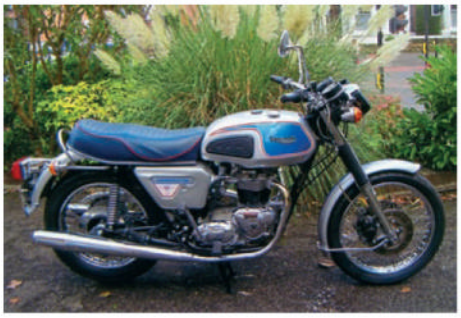
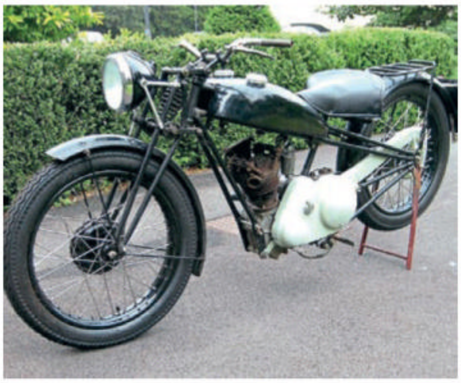


BIKES

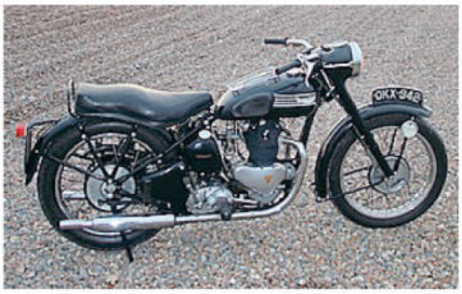
ROYAL ENFIELD CLIPPER, single cylinder 250cc. Silver / black paintwork, chrome mudguards and rear shocks. Very good wheels and tyres. New battery. Lightweight. £2950. Free delivery arranged. 01723 372219, North Yorkshire



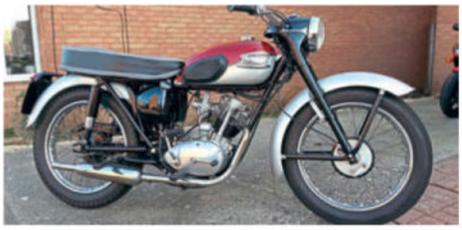
TRIUMPH SILVER JUBILEE BONNEVILLE, 1977. Limited edition with factory certificate. From a private collection. 7517 miles. Uprated to twin discs and electronic ignition. Previous tax discs and MoTs. Current V5C. As new condition. £7950. Free delivery arranged. 01723 372219, North Yorkshire



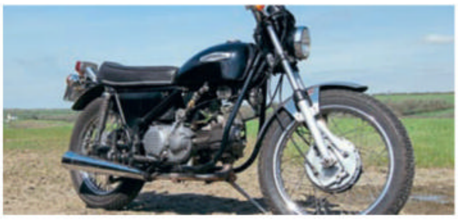
COTTON PYTHON PROJECT. Interesting Rudge 250cc 4-valve engined bike, c1935. This is a work in progress with much of the work done, but much still to do. For more details email lclavis@hotmail.com or call 0777 5859683



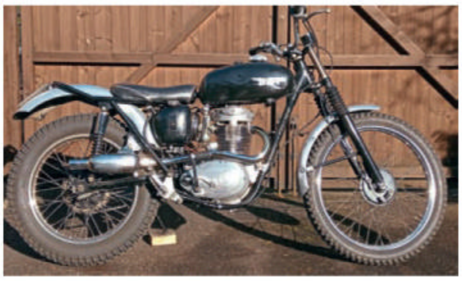
TRIUMPH 3T, 1951. Matching numbers, TOC dating cert. Original buff log book and all MoTs. Restored 200.7 Excellent condition. Starts easily and runs but needs a small amount of carburettor fettling to run smoothly. This is reflected in the price. Currently sitting in my shed. Needs to be out there on the roads. Very slick gear change, perfect exhausts, good tyres. All electrics work. Generally rides very well and is great fun on back roads. £5850. John, 07908 918825. Collection only from London E11



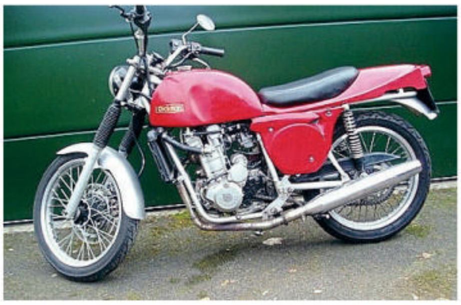
TRIUMPH TIGER CUB, 1961. Full restoration including engine and gearbox. Good running order for summer. £3500. 07941 418093, Reading, Berkshire



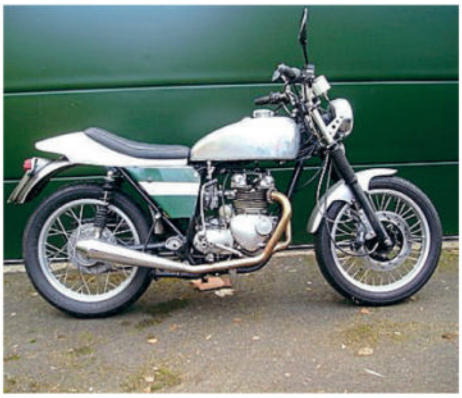
AERMACCHI HARLEY-DAVIDSON SS350, 1974. Black, fully functioning rebuilt electric starter. Runs very well, steers a treat and is light and easy to handle. Rowena's very own bike! £4250. Call Chris, 07748 114339 or c.spaett@btinternet.com



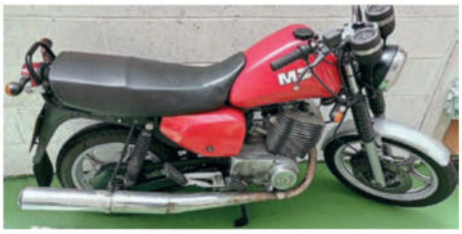
BSA 350cc trials bike. 1960 BSA C15 frame fitted with 1964 B40FSS engine. Bantam wheels and forks. B44 exhaust system, B50 tank. Engine has alloy barrel. Last used in 2018 and was running well then but will need recommissioning. Very tidy. Registered with V5C. £2500ono. Steve, 01299 271639, Worcs



RICKMAN ZUNDAPP, 1973. Road registered in 2012. Fitted with Kawasaki KLX250 engine with electric start. Discs front and rear. Good tyres and new battery. Goes very well and is light and easy to handle. Currently on SORN. £2600ono. 01434 633098, Northumberland



BSA B25 OIF, 1971. Fitted with Triumph T100P 500cc engine. 270/90 degree crank, Newman cams, Pazon ignition, belt primary drive and electric start. Tank Shop tank and seat unit, disc front brake and spin on oil filter. Currently on SORN. £3800ono. 01434 633098, Northumberland



MZ ETZ 251, 1994. Working bike, needs some recommissioning. Good overall condition. £650ono. Pictures available. 07730 110158 or poloenfield700@googlemail.com

SEND YOUR SMALL AD by post to PO Box 66, Bude EX23 9ZX, or email words and a pic to TP@realclassic.net

KAWASAKI W800, 2020. Excellent condition. 3680 miles. Heated grips. Luggage rack. Engine protector bars. Bridgestone BT46 tyres (almost new – 300 miles). Soft pannier support brackets. £5850. 07715 427219. NW Lancs

BSA GOLDEN FLASH, 1960. Matching numbers. V5C. Genuine bike in beige and chrome, all fasteners replaced with stainless. Side and main stands, fully enclosed chaincase. Original Vokes air filter C/W wing mirror. Nice usable bike. £5250. 07749 651188 or andybean53@hotmail.com Warwickshire

HONDA CB250, 2002. Built by Montesa-Honda, imported from Spain in 2011, purchased by me in 2015. Presently showing just under 35k on converted speedo (true mileage around 29K). Recent MoT, no advisories. A very clean example of this lightweight European model which has benefit of Grimeca wheels and tubeless Metzeler tyres and a very low seat height. Cruise at indicated 60mph all day, 300 plus miles to a full tank. Oil changed every 2K. Fitted GIVI top box, Tutoro chain oiler and clutch assist. Some history, Haynes manual, two keys etc. £1750 please. 01202 737377 or onorthcott@yahoo.co.uk Poole, Dorset

BSA BANTAM D7, 1965, 175cc with V5C. Running project to complete with new parts. Good potential and price. £1295. 01297 489578 or callbrig@gmail.com Dorset

AJS14, 250cc, 1961. Fettled and recommissioned over winter to run and ride with new electrics, oils and cables, etc. Now ready for someone to improve/restore. I can email more pics and video. £1850. 07821 671692, Notts NG9

BSA C15F, 1967. Runs well and is used on the road. The brakes are typical of the period! Current speedo reading is 13560 miles. I have no idea if that is genuine. V5 present in my name. Tax & MoT exempt. New front tyre, new carburettor, new ignition switch and coil in my ownership. Reducing collection to make space for new bike. A good introduction to classic bikes or a lighter machine for the older rider. Viewing welcome (Teesside area). £2000ono. Steve, 07859 910511 or stevebsa@btinternet.com

BSA M33 plunger, 1954. 500cc single featured in RC137. Badged as a Silver Star which it isn't. Fitted with Thorspark electronic coil ignition it's an easy starter. Monobloc carb and 4-spring clutch with new friction plates. A pleasant ride and I would keep it if I could. £5200. Email v7john@outlook.com for more photos and information. John, 01545 580249 evenings. Ceredigion, Wales

TRIUMPH T150V TRIDENT, 750cc, 1974, 20K miles. V5C in my name. Nice clean unrestored, mostly original riding bike. CV carbs, electronic ignition, recent steering head bearings, front brake hose, solid state reg/rec. £7250, may p/x. 07876 704268, Norfolk

BSA M20 WITH STEIB SIDECAR, 1950. Starts and runs well. £3.5K spent on rebuild. Looking for offers around £8.5k. 07934 049710 or briana.wheelan@btinternet.com

MATCHLESS 500 SINGLE. Engine appears the be a 1959 G80 with comp mag. It sounds healthy when running but my brother's never ridden it. Looks like a fresh build. Anyway, he's asking £3500ono. Andybarkshire@msn.com

READER ADS

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SUZUKI RV125. EFI model. MoT June. Excellent condition, low miles (2411). £3000ono. 07974 862441, Lancs

ROYAL ENFIELD 350 THUNDERBIRD. Excellent condition, MoT August. Very low miles (664). £3000ono. 07974 862441, Lancs

WANTS

SUNBEAM S7 Deluxe frame wanted, with or without a V5c, as I have almost all the other parts to build one. Please call 07885 441194 if you can help

CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE any size wanted by enthusiast, can be in any condition or incomplete. Cash waiting. 07811 189755

WANTED CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE retirement project. Consider anything British or Jap. Good price paid by enthusiast. Trev, 07398 052043
BSA BANTAM. Pair of rear chrome crash bars wanted. 02392 455592, evenings. Hants

BRITISH BIKE WANTED for a restoration project. AJS, Ariel, BSA, Norton, Triumph ideal, but anything considered. Can collect. 07984 950257

TRIUMPH T100, T140, 5TA or any pre-unit Triumph wanted. Owned all previously and would like another, either whole bike or one needing work. Can collect. 07984 950257

BITS

SUZUKI T500 frame. No log book. Engine, forks, other bits. 07772 880323, Crewe

TRIUMPH T100/T110 pre-unit front air scoop front brake plate with all fittings and shoes. The rare 1957 changeover year with depressed centre. Good undamaged condition. £150 inc UK post. 07960 447592

BSA A7/ A10 etc air filter. Original steel filter with mesh cover and spring clip. Spray painted in gloss black and ready to fit, no rust and in excellent condition. £50 inc UK post. 07960 448592

BSA A10 big journal crank, £120. Gearbox, £180. Matching numbers. Small journal crank £125. Front wheel £120. Rocker box, £25. With con rods £110. Rocket crankcases. 07968 390994, West Mids

BATS

LIGHTWEIGHT, SINGLE bike trailer, with spare wheel and lighting board. Good condition. £180. 07854 348947, Swindon (And THANKS! for the fantabulous Dairy Box, Ron. Went down a total treat! TP)

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Send your Small Ad to the fabulously delicious Typing Person and it'll appear in the very next issue of the magazine. A selection of spiffy bikes for sale will also be showcased on the Real-Classic.co.uk website. So send a splendid photo of your bike, side-on, clearly visible, as the best images will appear online. JPGs sent by email are perfect, or you can use our online form at Real-Classic.co.uk

MODEL		
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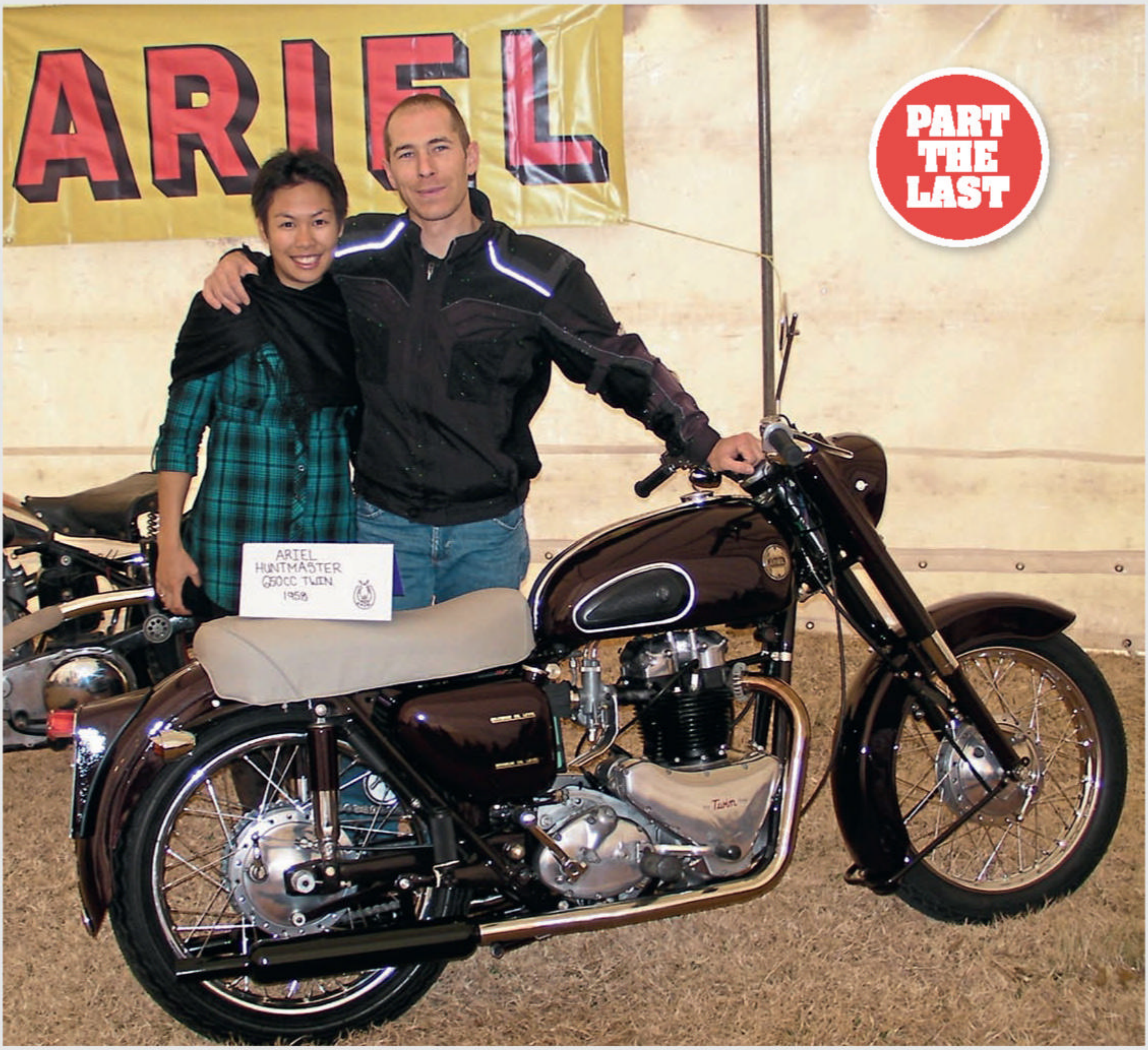

ARIEL
ARIEL
HUNTMASTER
650CC TWIN
1958
Twin

PART THE LAST

DESTINY'S CHILD

Luke's Ariel 650 has been a lifelong project, one which placed him on a pathway towards practical problem-solving. Over time, they've both benefitted…

Photos by LukeR / RC RChive

The Huntmaster starting to take shape in the lounge of Luke's bachelor pad. The lathe and milling machine are just out of shot. His landlady had no issues with this when she realised she had a free handyman!

The scrounged mudguard to be used at the front

The correct rear mudguard, as found in the club's containers

Right: Trial assembly and fitment of the front mudguard

A front mudguard with the basic shape was found, probably from a similar era of motorcycle if not an Ariel. The very characteristic back tube support / front stand was missing. This was made from a piece of pipe, with the ends forged flat using the end of a spanner to get the characteristic blending. I decided not to go for the front stays that is sometimes seen on Ariels and followed an illustration from a period advert instead. With the centre and back brace the mudguard is more than stiff enough and the brackets were specifically made for the bike, so they hug the wheel centrally.

Incredibly I managed to find the correct back mudguard for the Ariel, and with a little clean-up and knocking the odd dent out it fitted perfectly. Nothing more than a good coat of paint was then needed.

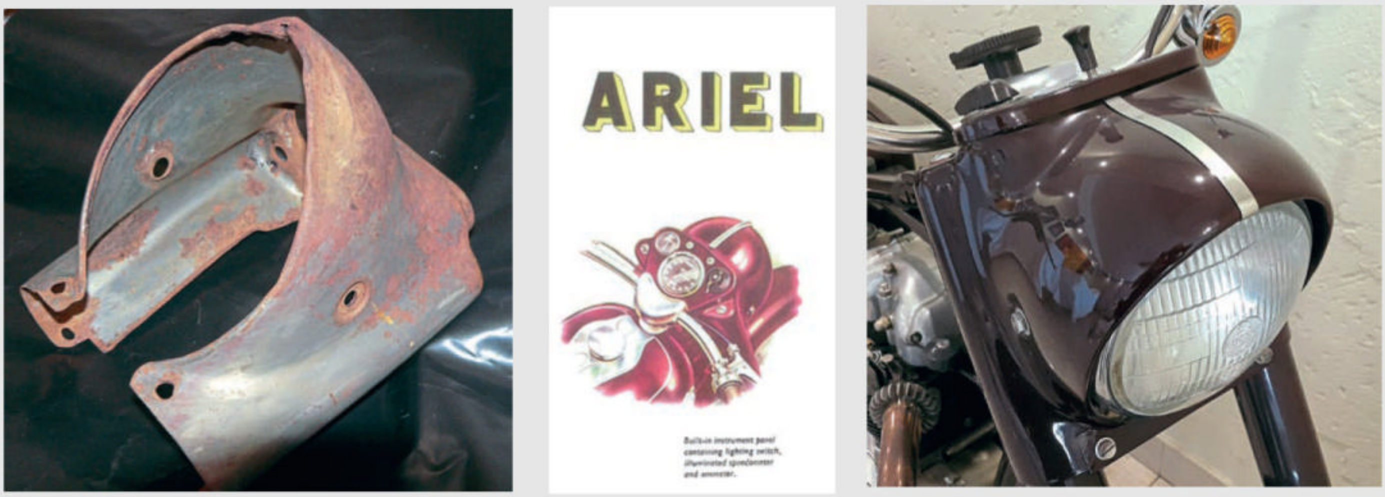
The front cowl had some rather bad accident damage, but it was far better than what had been fitted to the bike. Panel beating this cowl to a shape that I was happy with and would paint nicely required considerable patience, and a number of home-made panel beating tools, to coax the correct shape out of the damaged metal. The tear visible at the top was left until the end to take up the inevitable stretch of the material. This was neatly brazed and filed flush.

Further on in the build, both mudguards in place and looking fine indeed

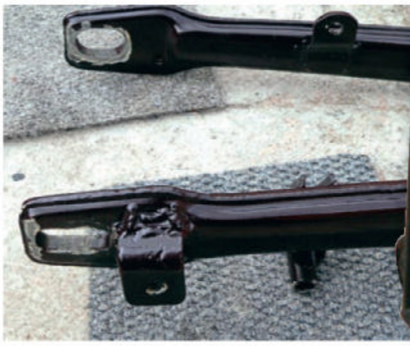
At some point in the Ariel's life the shock bracket on the swinging arm had been removed and replaced with a welded contraption. Unfortunately this made adjusting the back wheel very difficult. Without a positive screw holding the shaft in place the wheel tended to pull askew after a few rides, unless of course you tightened the shaft unnecessarily tight. A new bracket was bent, with the necessary machined bits fitted, and welded to the swinging arm, including a positive adjusting screw to the back shaft.

A number of shafts were replaced during this second phase of restoration. I have no idea why there were so many that didn't fit properly. Many of the shafts showed clear signs of modification or repair. One

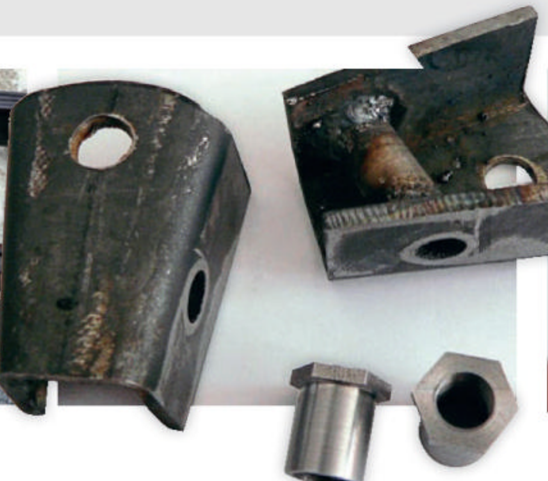
➤


ARIEL
Built-in instrument panel containing lighting switch, illuminated speedometer and ammeter.

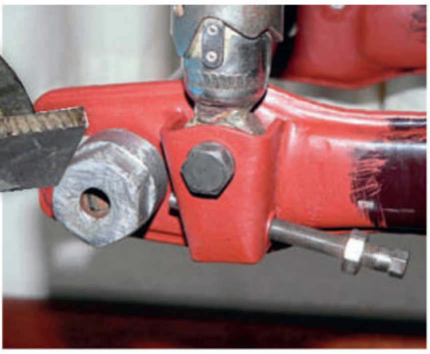
Front cowl as found, complete with some horrible accident damage. And an artist's impression of what it should look like – followed by the finished article. Luke hasn't got around to casting something closer to the original, and that may never happen. He likes the strip as is!



The lack of back wheel adjustment caused by poor welding for the home-made shock bracket. Credit goes to the previous owner for this piece of workmanship!



New brackets, complete with adjustment for the back wheel



Swinging arm shock bracket and adjusting screw fitted. Slightly better welding from the current owner!

good example was the brake lever shaft, which must have broken when the bike was dropped. I wasn't particularly keen to keep a welded shaft on a braking component so I machined a new one. I lost count of all the bits and pieces I machined as the build progressed. My general rule was that if it didn't look right or was repaired then a new one was made.

The silencers that were fitted when I got the Huntmaster were probably off the same Japanese bike that donated the mudguards. The headers had rusted through so the entire exhaust system needed to be remade. Fortunately my welding was getting better, so I was confident I could make a nice set of exhausts. I decided to go for standard tubing for the silencers, and a simple design typical of that era. The characteristic lip at the end of the silencer was forged using an inner former and some careful strikes with the rounded end of a large ball peen hammer. These silencers were made with normal stick welding, and will likely rust away over time, but I should get a few miles out of them before they need to be replaced.

The headers were made from stainless, and bent at one of the friendly exhaust shops willing to entertain my hobby. I TIG welded the expandable ends as well as the mounting brackets to allow for a little flexibility. Surprisingly it all worked out with only one attempt.

Originally the exhaust system was chromed, so my system is a significant deviation from a typical restoration. Personally I prefer the bike with the current exhausts, and I have a feeling they will last far longer than what would have been originally fitted. On the plus side they cost very little to make.

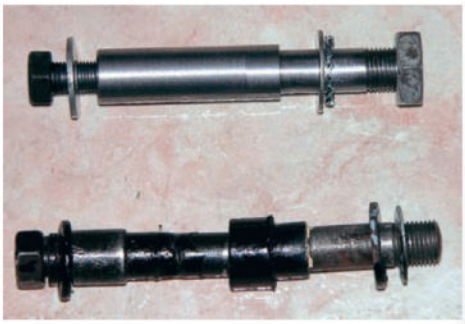
Imperial seals aren't easy to find here, but you do still get the more common sizes. Unfortunately not all of the sizes used on the Huntmaster are available and some aren't even listed anymore. I decided to replace all the seals with whatever I could source locally, typically from industrial stock. Seals that were too small on the outside were fitted with a sleeve; easy enough. Unfortunately the odd seal would not bend to that little trick, and the seal itself needed to be modified. One example was the fork seals, which were replaced with something very close with only the outer diameter skimmed on the lathe to fit.

Another interesting seal was the petrol tap seal, which was originally made from cork. The sealing force is adjusted by pulling the end towards the knurled pull lever compressing the cork. A replacement seal can be made from standard automotive fuel lines; easy enough to cut a few cleanly on the lathe pushed over a holding rod. The tap currently installed was made a few years ago with the centre spindle modified slightly for a reserve setting, something which I prefer for all of my bikes. The outside looks identical, with only a stepped slot machined on the shaft to get into the reserve position, but that's a story for another time!

All the cables were replaced. The choke system had to be made from scratch as this had been removed at some point. All the fittings were machined by scaling the parts diagrams from the workshop manual and fitting them to what was on the bike. I found it cheaper to buy the smaller cables from bicycle shops (for the throttle and choke), and the thicker cables from the automotive industry. The handbrake cable from a car is long enough to make all the brake cables on the bike with some to spare, and costs less than a single meter ordered online.

The electrics on these bikes are incredibly rudimentary. There was no wiring on the bike when I got it, in fact the dynamo was missing. The wiring harness was put together following the wiring diagram when I was at school and worked well enough, with the dynamo sourced by my uncle and fitted to the bike with no major issues. I did very little at that point with the magneto. Little did I know this that was one of components which affected the Huntmaster's performance. During its second phase of restoration I added indicators, both for safety and to prevent uninformed traffic cops impounding the bike!

I was aware that the Ariel hadn't performed as it should, and I had a feeling that the problem was an electrical one. When I checked the dwell angle it looked wrong, and the points were blacker that I would expect. This immediately pointed me to the condenser in the magneto. After changing that for a



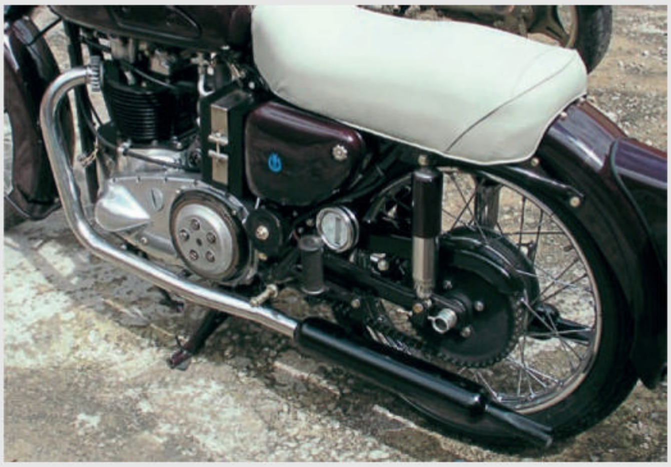
The old and new brake shafts, machined in Luke's small apartment and fitted to the Ariel frame

SILENCED

The parts for the silencers prior to welding them up

Silencers ready for fitting to the bike

The finished stainless steel header pipes

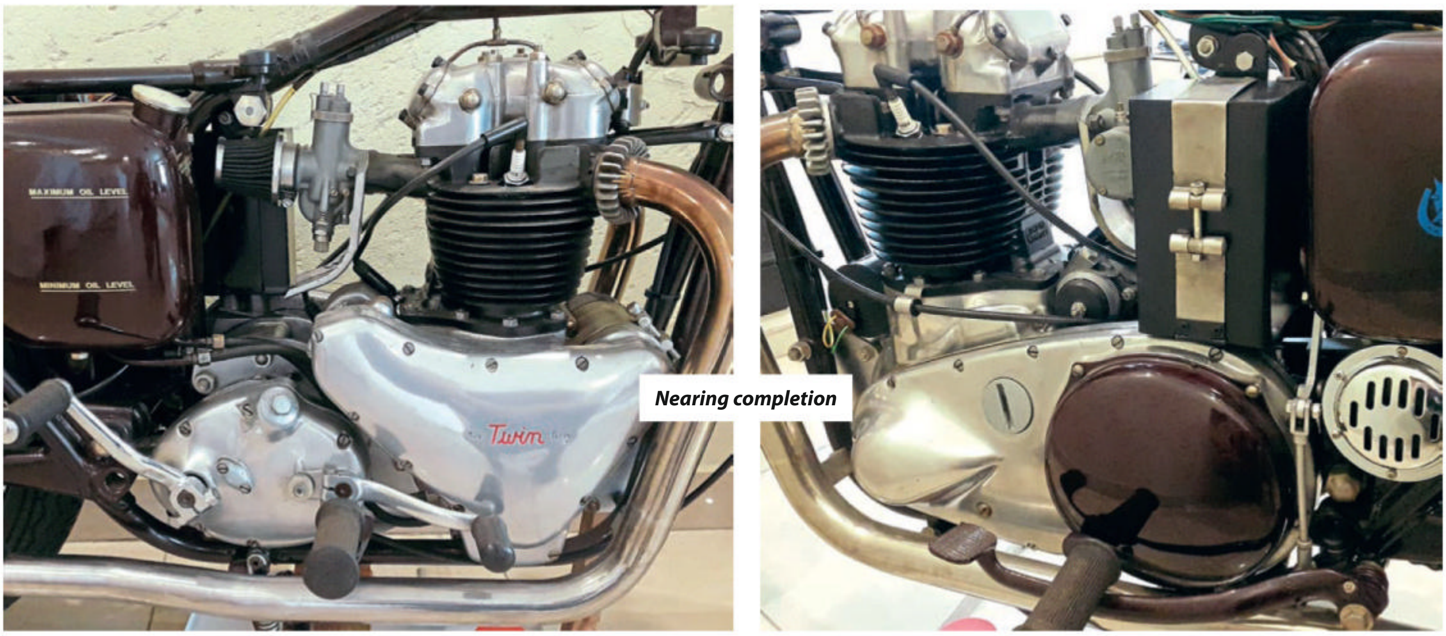


All together now, the exhaust system in place

new capacitor, the performance of the bike was greatly improved. Thankfully the bike hadn't done much mileage so the points were recoverable and the windings were still fine.

The tank badges were an interesting component to make. I had one 'good' badge which was on the bike when I got it. This was used to make a flexible silicone mould. A number of badges were made in this mould using a potable resin and finished off nicely by painting the back recesses. I believe my Ariel would originally have worn gold badges, but I felt the dark maroon would be better broken by a brighter red tank badge. When I fitted them I felt they complimented the bike very well.

Now the Ariel runs well and is used for special occasions or when I feel like taking her for a Sunday drive… but she'll never be completed in my eyes. Many people shudder when I tell them of some of the components I've made that are, strictly speaking, not standard. I'll probably never win any medals with her; the closest I've gotten is when someone entered me into a concours at a classic bike show without my knowledge. I found an elderly gentleman on all fours ➤



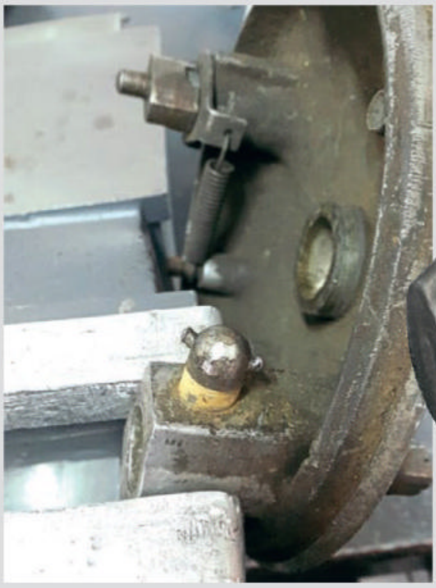
Nearing completion

looking at the back end of her. When I asked what he was doing he replied 'I'm looking for a stamp'. It turned out he was looking for a stamp on the exhaust. I made numerous attempts to explain there was no stamp on the exhausts (I would know because I made them) and him assuring me that they were bought, I politely asked him to remove my name from the list and that was that.

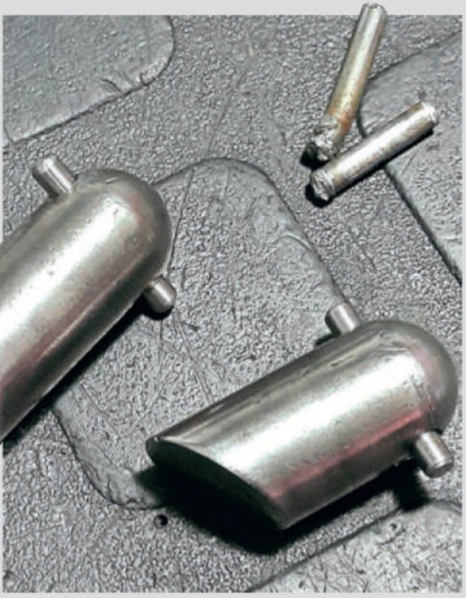
The Ariel's ongoing restoration will be to further improve the ride quality and to get her to run as efficiently as possible, without compromising on the classic look and feel of the machine. Some of these improvements have already been done – like upper engine support bars and balancing the engine properly, which has made the bike much smoother than some other twins. In the long term, the Ariel was always destined to benefit from the problem-solving career it originally steered me towards!

Job done. Ready to ride!

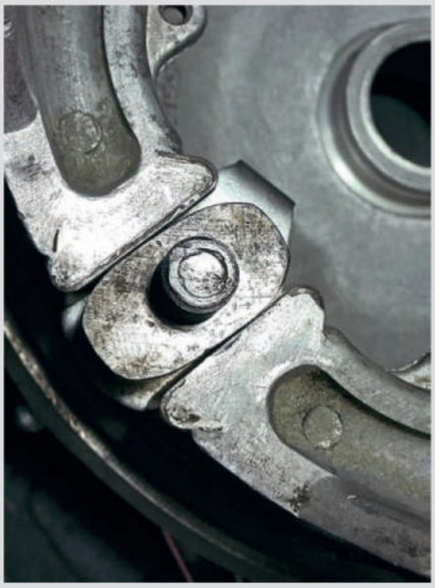
MAKING BRAKES



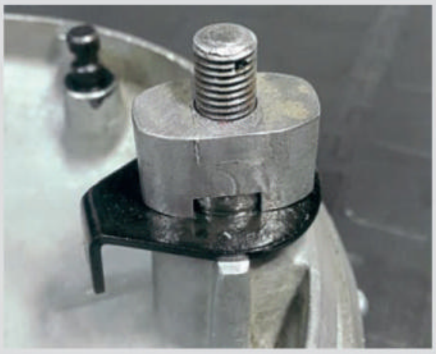
Original brakes showing the seized top locating pins. The smaller cross pins were damaged during disassembly



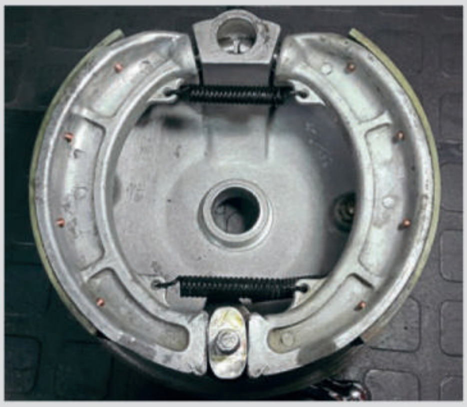
New brake pins machined, ready for assembly



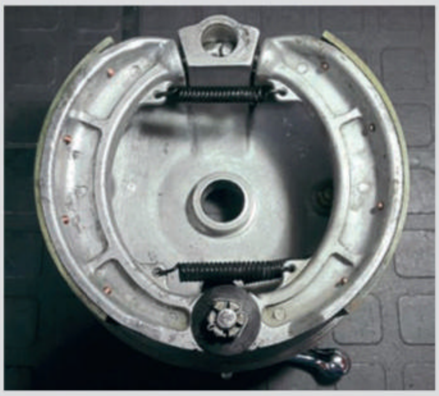
Original cam showing very poor engagement. The cam rotates counter-clockwise as viewed, resulting in a loss of brake lever movement which made brake adjustment very difficult. This was due to component wear stacking up



The original cam was flipped around to engage the unworn cam profile. The original slot was silver brazed closed with a little key steel, and a new slot was machined with a slight angle to improve brake engagement



Reworked brakes showing the modified cam with immediate engagement. This makes setting the brakes much easier and vastly improves the actual braking



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Photos by Stu Thomson

Classic techniques

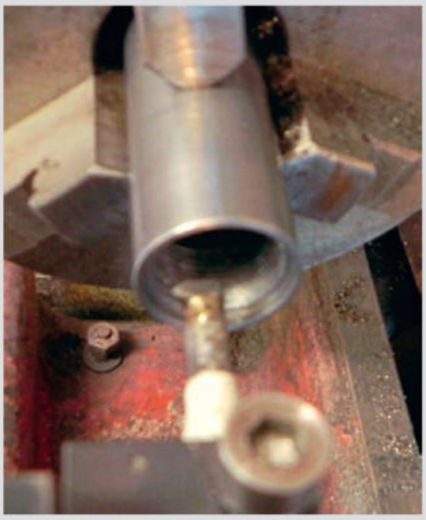
Stu's bike, before its fork refurb

If you own a Triumph, BSA or Norton then most tele forks can be bought off the shelf, at a price. For Stu Thomson's Italian tiddler, the solution wasn't quite so straightforward…

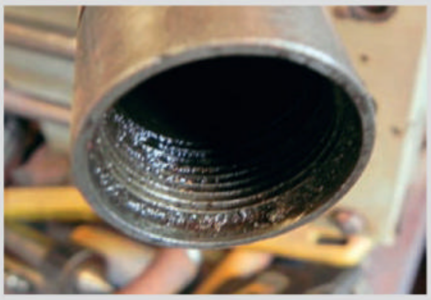
On one of my Gileras the paintwork around the front suspension and headlamp looked a little tired. It had obviously been touched up over the years with several colours by previous owners – all red but different shades. From a distance it looked OK, but close up it was obvious that the surface had not been given a lot of attention prior to painting. 'Tarted up to sell' would be a good description.

So I thought I would refurbish the front end and, like all jobs, it turned into a bigger job than anticipated. Once it was apart

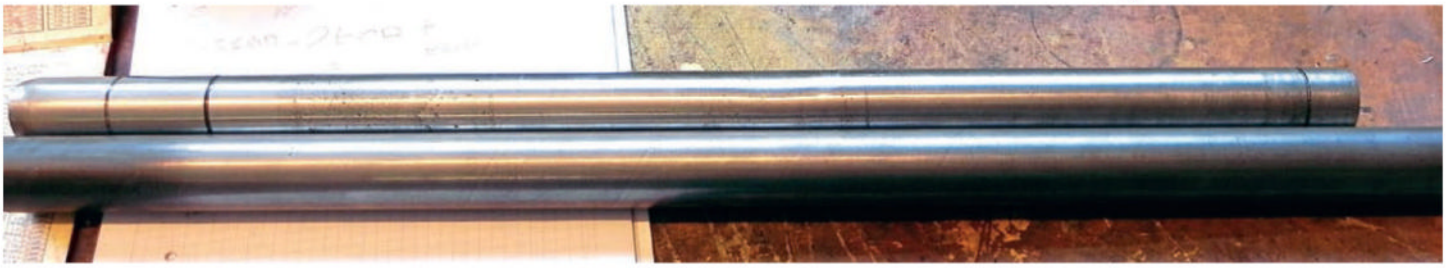
CUTTING THREAD



Thread being cut in the tube with a 60-degree tungsten carbide tool



The top thread



Old and new tubes, side by side, prior to the lathe work. Old fork leg above and new material below with ex-works phosphate finish

Right: Two new tubes ready to go back into the forks. Nice and shiny, but more importantly they're straight, true and accurate with a good surface finish

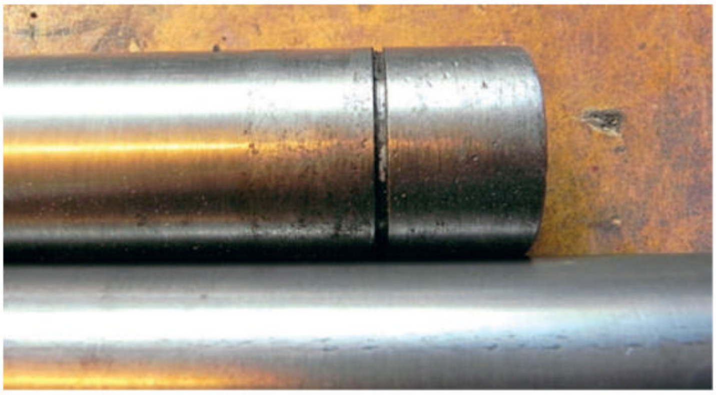
I could see the steering races were a bit notched, the fork legs were a bit pitted, they were not exactly straight and were oval where the lower yoke clamp fits.

The original paint on the fork legs was the usual minimal thickness for Italian bikes from the 1960s. New coats of 2k Carmine red were applied to the legs, fork shrouds and top and bottom yoke. I tidied up the headlamp wiring and refurbished the steering bearings by fitting new ball bearings. The surfaces of the races were cleaned with a small, round grindstone with the Dremel in the lathe. Surprisingly, 5/32" ball bearings were specified in the parts manual for this model. I'm not sure why they weren't a metric size, as this size is virtually 4mm (3.97mm).

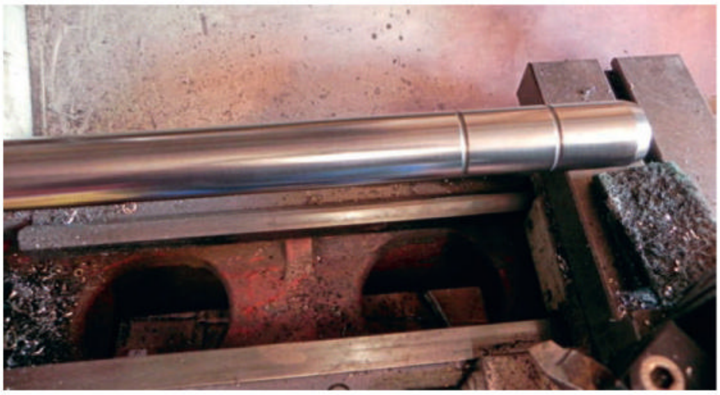
As most of you who rebuild old bikes know, finding things like fork stanchions for an unusual 1960s bike can be a challenge – especially if that bike's a Gilera. If you can find a set then they are usually very expensive. Sometimes stanchions can be refurbished and hard chromed if they are not too badly damaged; again, an exercise costing well over £200.

The stanchions on the Gilera have an outside diameter of 30mm and an inside diameter of 24mm. They're relatively simple in design, with an internal thread at one end for the fork top nuts, a circlip groove near the top to locate the stanchion in the top yoke, and two oil retaining grooves at the lower end of the fork. There's also a small taper at the bottom to stop any chance of locking the yokes on full compression. The fork stanchions run directly in the alloy fork legs, there being no separate bearings, as was the practice at the time. The original fork legs weren't chromed as they were hidden behind shrouds.

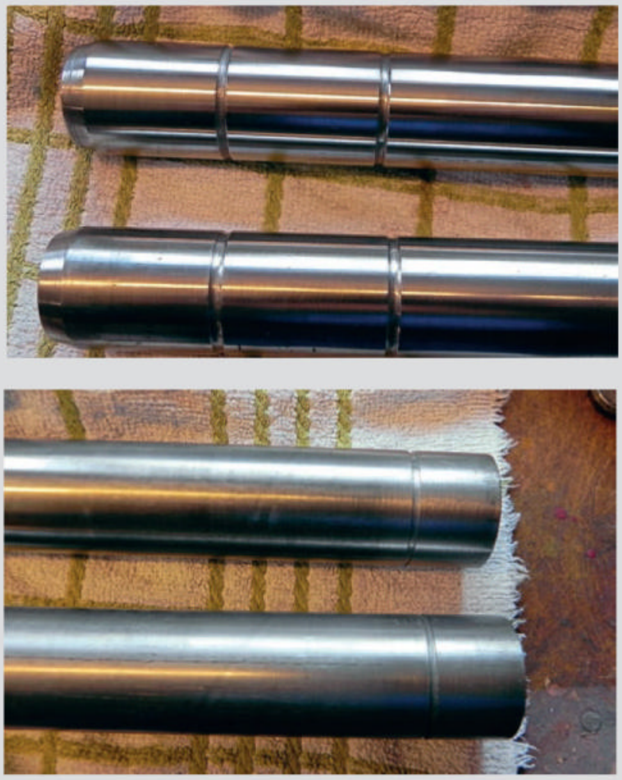
I have fabricated fork stanchions before, using high tensile precision hydraulic steel tube. These were successful on my Moto Guzzi Lodola and MV Agusta 175, although they were for the earlier design of upside-down forks that were very popular in the early 50s. I found some tube of the correct dimensions for the Gilera. The cost for enough to make two stanchions was £35.95, so I thought it was worth trying. In case you want to do the same, I opted for 30mm x 24mm, 3mm wall, cold-drawn ➤



The circlip groove at the top of the stanchion



Final polishing in the lathe



Top (right) and bottom of the new tubes in greater detail

In case you wondered, this is a dapping block

seamless precision steel tube to DIN2391/C.

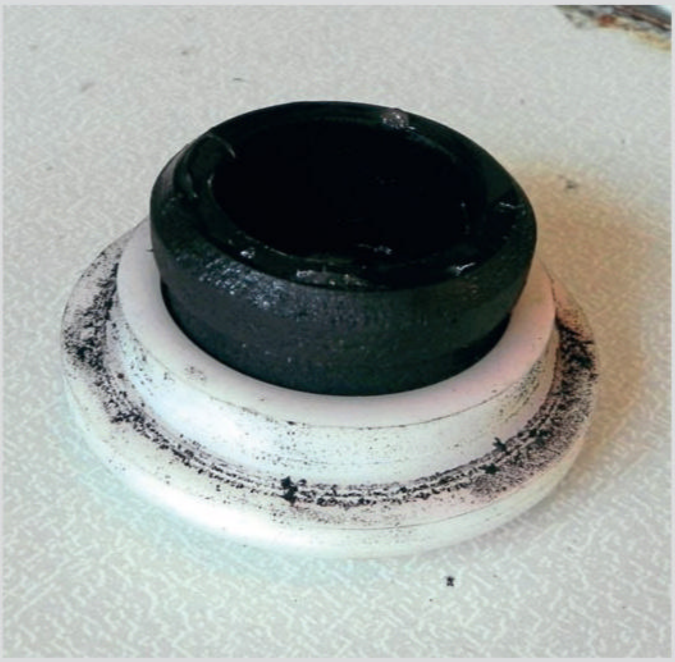
The DIN standard indicates that the tube should be within plus/minus 0.15mm for a diameter of 30mm. On the face of it, that appears to be a rather large tolerance. If the tube is bought from a trusted UK supplier then the dimensions are much tighter. The tube I received was -0.03mm tolerance, so was perfect for the job. In Imperial measurements it was -0.0012", which matched the dimensions of the unworn parts of the old fork stanchions.

Being high tensile and cold-drawn, the material is quite tough. Care needs to be taken when cutting the internal thread (which was 26mm by 1.5mm pitch) using small cuts on each pass with a sharp tungsten carbide tool.

The next task was to make the various rubber buffers that abound on the forks. As well as the top rubber close to the top yoke there is a rubber inside the fork shroud, and another rubber that fixes to the chrome fork seal holder. After 60 years some of the rubber parts have hardened and become brittle after contact with fork oil. Most are unobtainable or very expensive. Fork seals are at least easily available at 30mm / 40mm diameter, for about £6 for a pair. These are just standard rotary seals which I have used before and if extra sealing is needed then double lip seals can be used.

BUFFERING

The old, cracked rubber buffer


A jam chuck for machining rubber

The finished rubber buffer

New rubber buffer made and located in position

Rebuilding the forks with the new stanchions

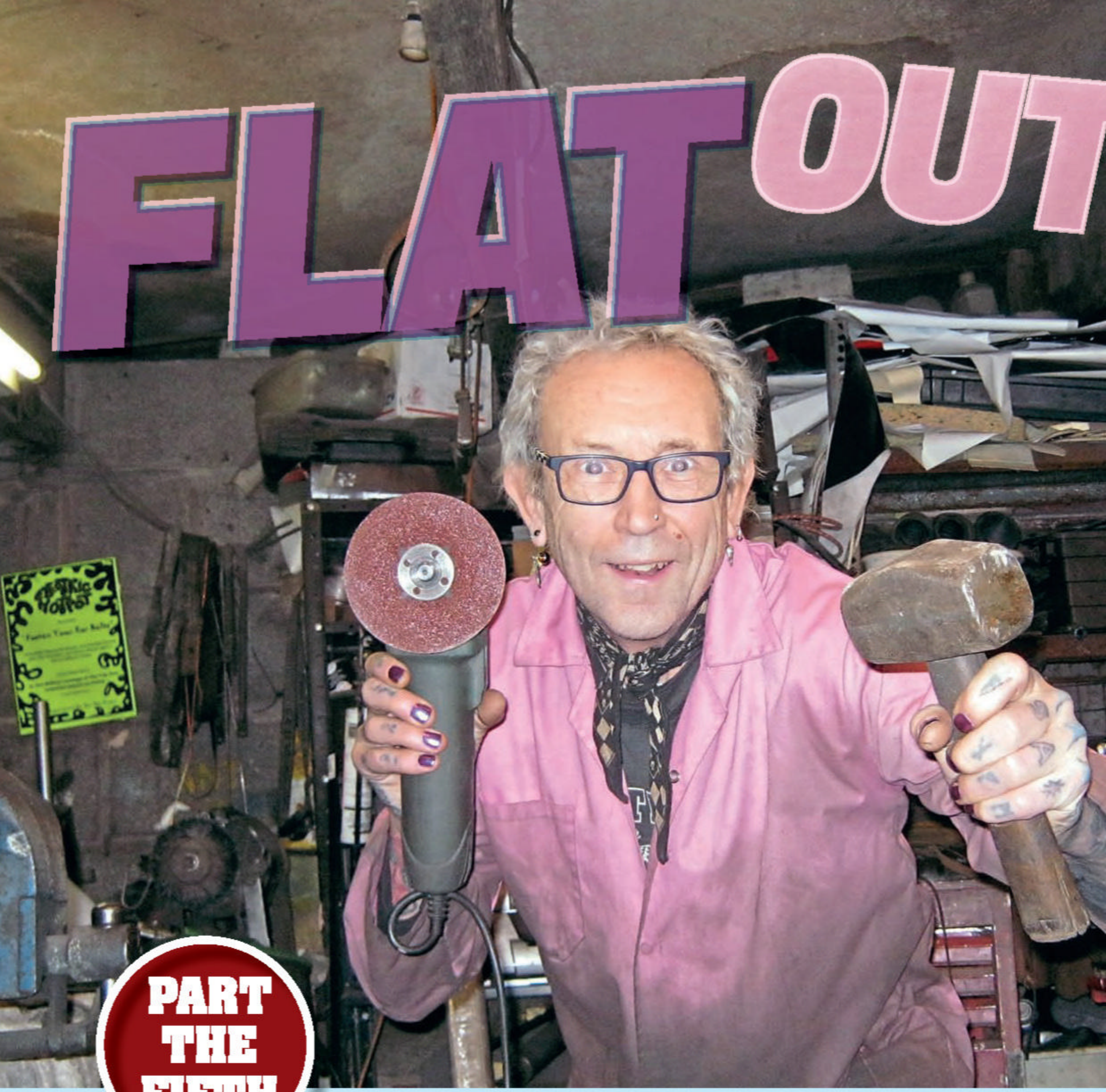
Machining the other parts is possible using dapping block rubber. This is used in jewellery making as a soft anvil when shaping gold or silver. You can buy blocks of this rubber for a minimal cost on eBay; a 6" square block is around £7 delivered). Then using very sharp HSS tools it is possible to machine the rubber on a lathe, milling machine or band saw. You could even use a very sharp craft knife or hole punches using a press. You do have to be quite inventive to hold the rubber while machining, however.

I used some proven woodturning techniques. These involve making jam chucks where a piece of material – nylon or wood – is machined so that the rubber is a push fit into it. This then holds the material sufficiently firm when carrying out the further machining. For example, after the outer profile is machined to bore the centre of the rubber using drills or hole saws, glue can also be used which is water soluble.

With all the work completed, the forks were reassembled and installed back on the bike. They work much better than before and all the red parts are now the same colour! RC

Job done!

FLAT OUT

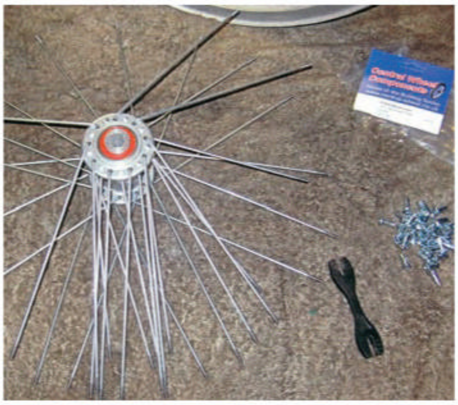


PART THE FIFTH

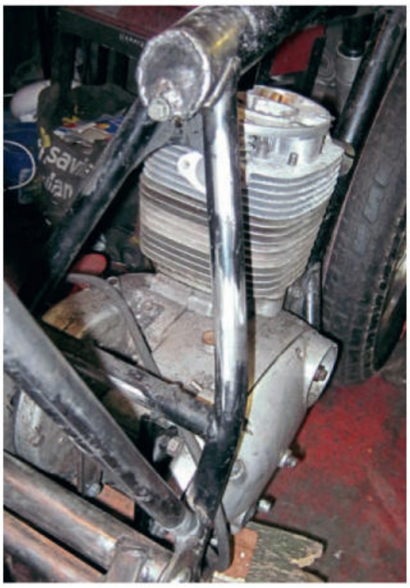
Photos by Odgie Himself

Odgie is building a world-beating vintage-class flat-tracker around a beefed up B50 engine. Last month he was waiting for wheels. This time: kinky pipes, too much anti-squat (what?) and fashioning a fuel tank. Oh, and about those wheels…

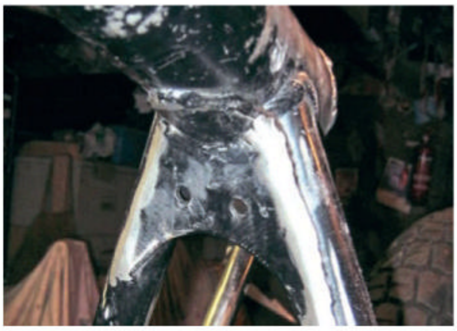
Right, we're cracking on with some fabrication again: always one of my favourite parts. To be fair, some of these photos are arranged in a sequence they didn't actually take place in, hence the engine being in and out in various ones. This seemed the best way to order them so there was some sort of flow and common sense(!) going on. Lots to get through this month too, so I'll get stuck into it...



Aha, the spokes finally arrive. Big question: did I measure and order them correctly and will they fit?

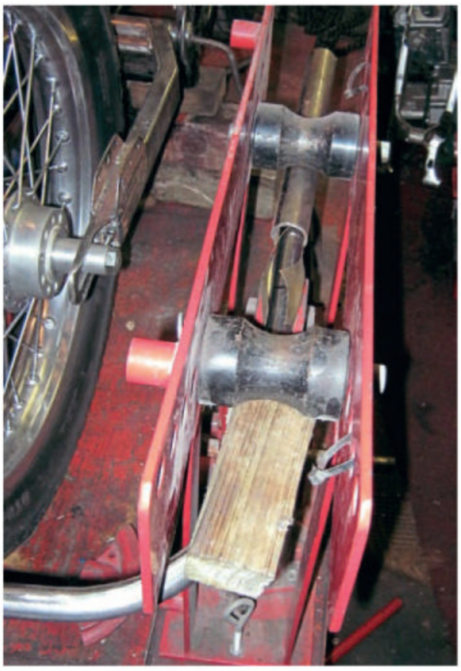


One of the critical areas when doing anything serious to a B50 is carb placement. The inlet tract manages to aim itself fairly directly towards the frame tube. That's fine if you're bolting a stock Concentric straight on, but if you're using adaptors to extend the tract and fit a different type of carb, packaging gets a bit fraught. To make matters worse, I wanted to use another Lectron, having had great success with them in the past (and not spending hours on a dyno or days at the track trying to sort jetting is also something of a bonus…). But the Lectron stands a lot taller than a Concentric, so height as well as frame tube clearance was going to be an issue. Getting rid of the right-hand frame tube would be a good start



But first, the little matter of cutting away the substantial frame gusseting…

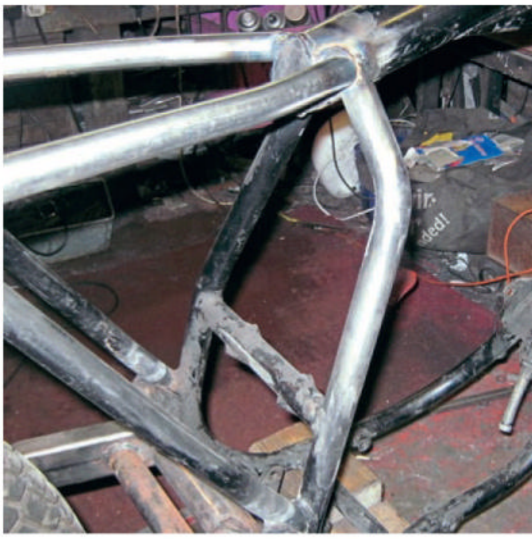
While I was at it, I bent some more tubing for the seat rails



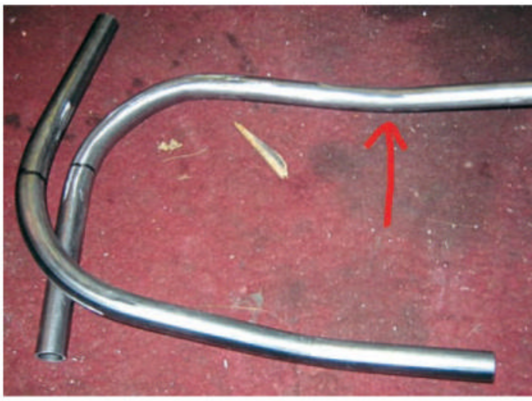
With the front part of the seat rails welded in, it was time to make the rear section – which incorporates the rear loop of course. I didn't even consider trying to make it one piece, I figured two matching sides would be tricky enough, and so it turned out. You'll see it better in the next photo, but here I've got a block of wood on one side and a length of larger diameter tube slipped over the other side, to try and get the bends in the right place

Clarke
STRONG-ARM
12 TON
PIPE BENDER

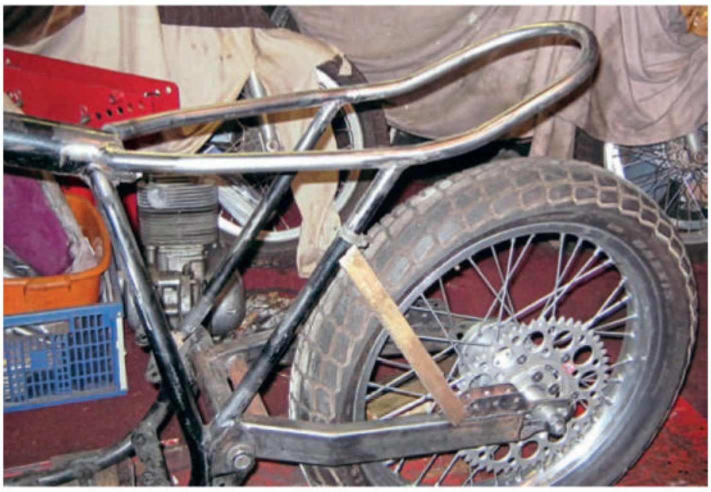
Then I procured some decent steel tubing off eBay and it was out with the pipe bender yet again. I didn't have a former for the exact diameter of the frame tube, hence the small piece of exhaust pipe you can see sitting in the former. It wasn't the nicest tube to bend either, despite my best efforts it did want to get kinky on me, but with patience and application and perseverance we got there in the end



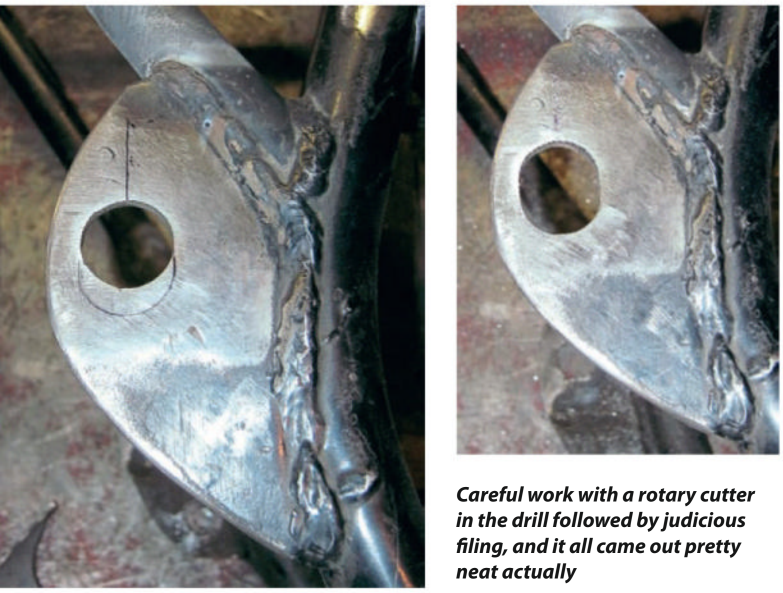
New frame tube in place, more along the lines of the earlier non-OiF Victor designs. It'll be a while before the carb arrives, it's on special order from the States, but hopefully there'll be enough clearance to mount it when it does get here



This is what I was trying to make. With the main 90-degree bend in place, I needed a smaller bend (arrowed) on a right angled plane to it to provide the kick up. Tricky bit of pipe bending with my limited skills, experience and equipment



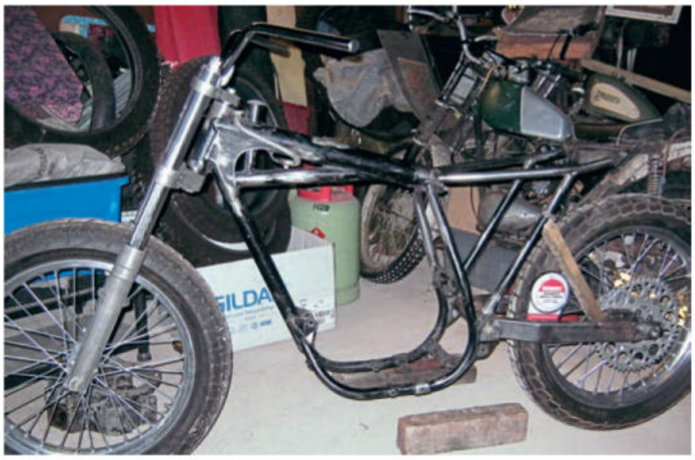
Oh look, it worked. It was a full afternoon of messing about, but I am quite pleased with the result



Careful work with a rotary cutter in the drill followed by judicious filing, and it all came out pretty neat actually

And after much thought, and then a bit more thought, some of which involved setting the swinging arm angle right first and then cutting the frame in lots of places to alter the rake, I finally settled on the easiest solution – lowering the swinging arm pivot point. Careful marking out was required here to get both sides exactly the same. The extra depth was easy enough to measure, but of course both holes must be elongated in the exact same direction, otherwise the swinging arm would run out of alignment. I scribed a vertical and central line both sides, and used that as a datum, then drew round a suitably sized washer aligned with that line...

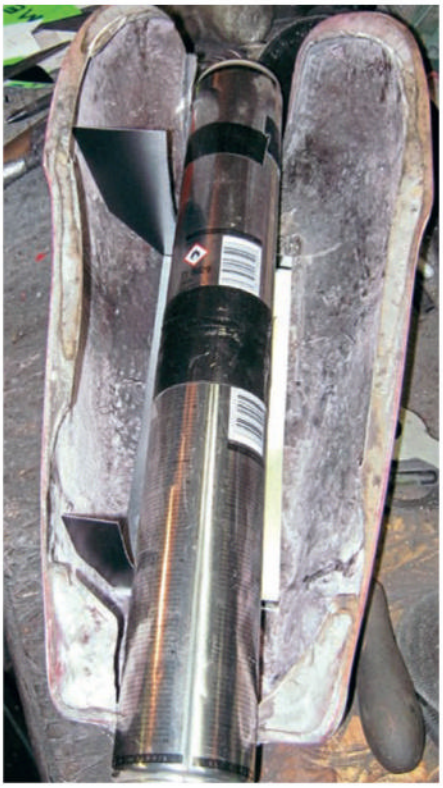
Job done, a really nice close fit – which it needs to be of course. The washers will hold them in place when the nut is tightened up, and if I do want to change the anti-squat, it will be a quick and easy job in the pits



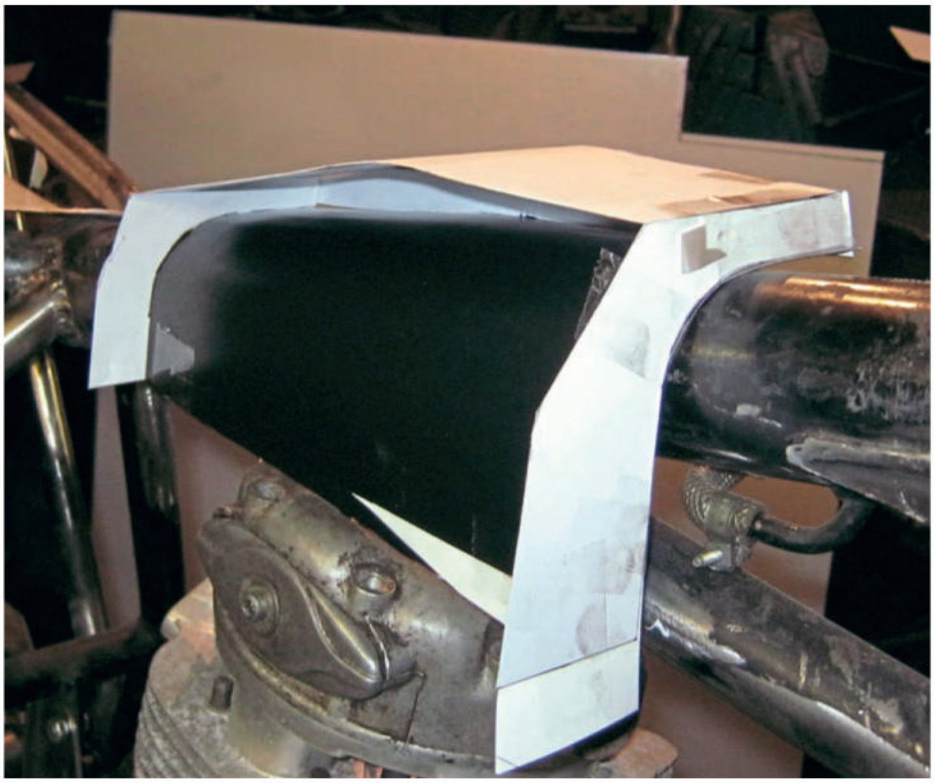
Yes, the spokes fitted and the rims are attached, phew. And with the chassis on its wheels and something to work to, I could make much more accurate measurements of the various angles for handling set-up. I cleared a space on the bit of actual level concrete I used to build cars on and then set to. Note the bit of wood with notches in it resting against the Jubilee clip – a quick and easy way to alter the rear ride height. Altering that and/or raising or dropping the forks gets the correct rake on the front end (basically tilting the bike fore and aft around a centre axis). But that comes at the expense of the swinging arm angle of course. Which in turn plays havoc with the anti-squat. I knew I was running lower gearing, which would increase the anti-squat, and I couldn't get the swinging arm into an angle that wouldn't also be doing the same (obviously the actual angles I am working to are closely guarded secrets, but the principles remain the same). Too much anti-squat is not a Good Thing. Mmm, pause for thought...

Then I made up some crescent-shaped packers out of a thick steel washer. Apologies for the slightly gory finger – I'm surprised it bleeds at all there now, the scar tissue is so thick from all the previous times the angle grinder has slipped off the workpiece, but those discs don't take any prisoners against any type of skin

Remember that old cheapo fibreglass tank from last month? I decided it was time to see if I could make anything of it. It looked fairly presentable sat on the bike, so what it needed next was a little fuel cell to go underneath it. But underneath it is the operative term, how do you make anything up under the tank cover when it's sat on the frame top tube? The answer was to make a dummy top tube, two gas canisters taped together and a small block of wood would do the job

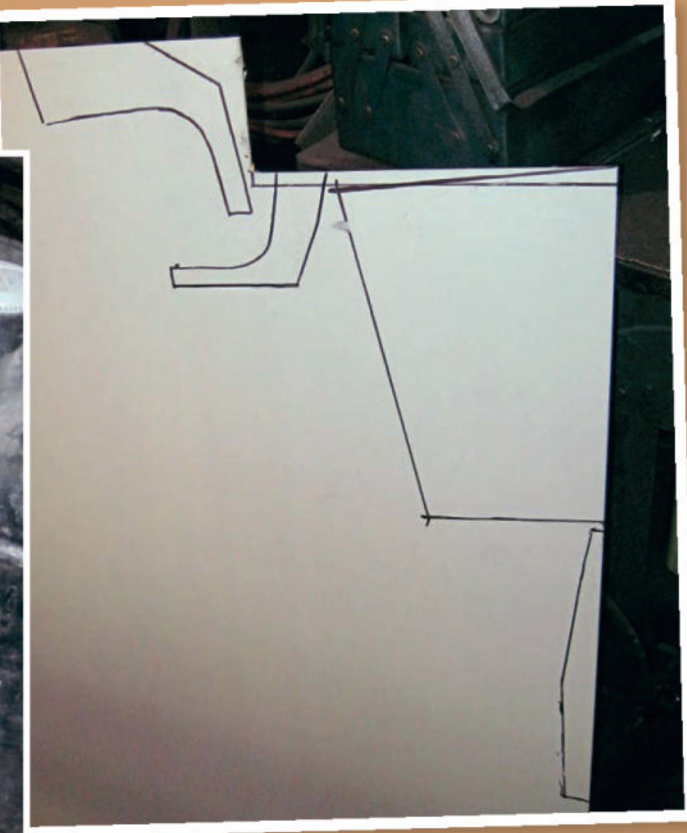


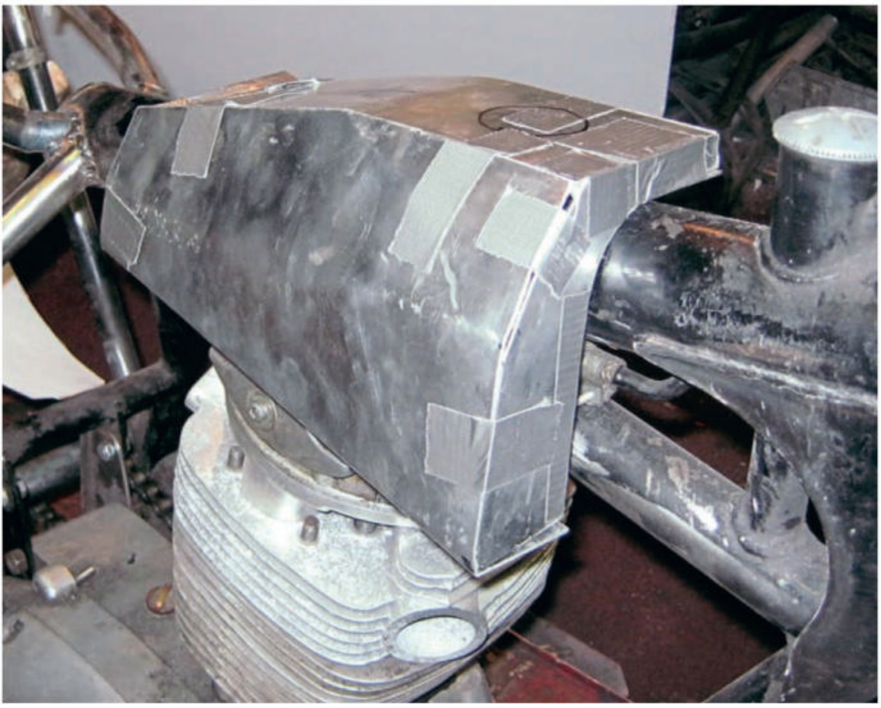
Now I could turn the tank cover upside down, the block of wood gave me the correct clearance, and I could start making card templates



Taping the templates together gave me something I could sit over the top tube and work out clearance to the rocker box, etc

Then it's a simple enough job to transfer the shapes onto some of the 1.2mm alloy sheet you'll recall me buying an episode or two ago





Ta-daaah! This is the basic fuel cell just taped together. It will need a filler cap and something for the centre-bolt fixing to go through, as well as an outlet. It may also need an alloy tube running through it to take the throttle cable, space will be that tight. Ideally I'd have made the fuel cell drop down on the left of the bike, to allow for the throttle cable on the right, but the rocker oil feed and head-steady would seriously restrict how far it could drop down, and I wanted a reasonable capacity for restarts, longer lap circuits, etc. So my plan is to get it mostly welded up, apart from the main side nearest the camera, then cut it about and get all the other parts made up, while I can still get access to the inside and all the swarf out, then get the main side welded in last. Be reet…

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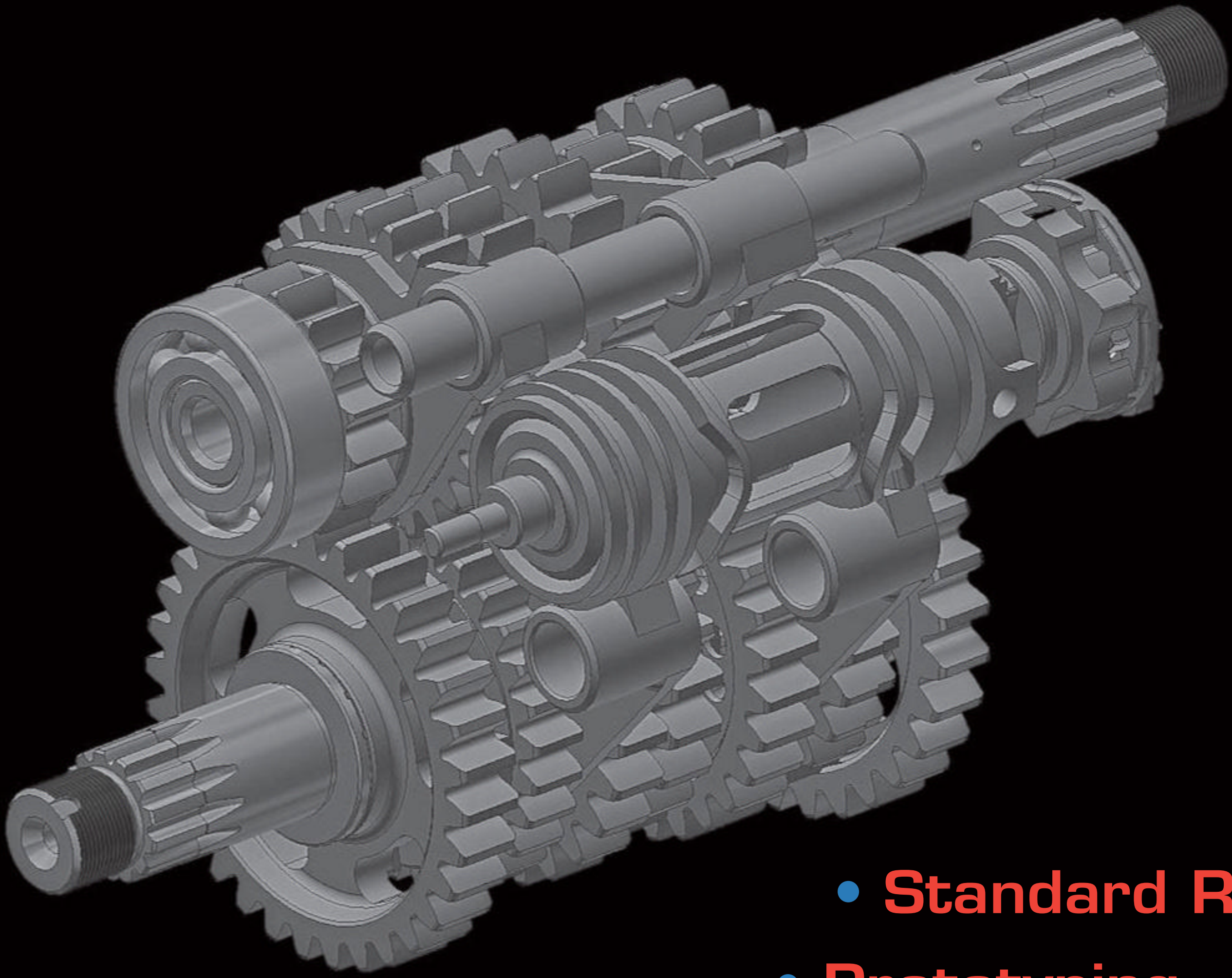

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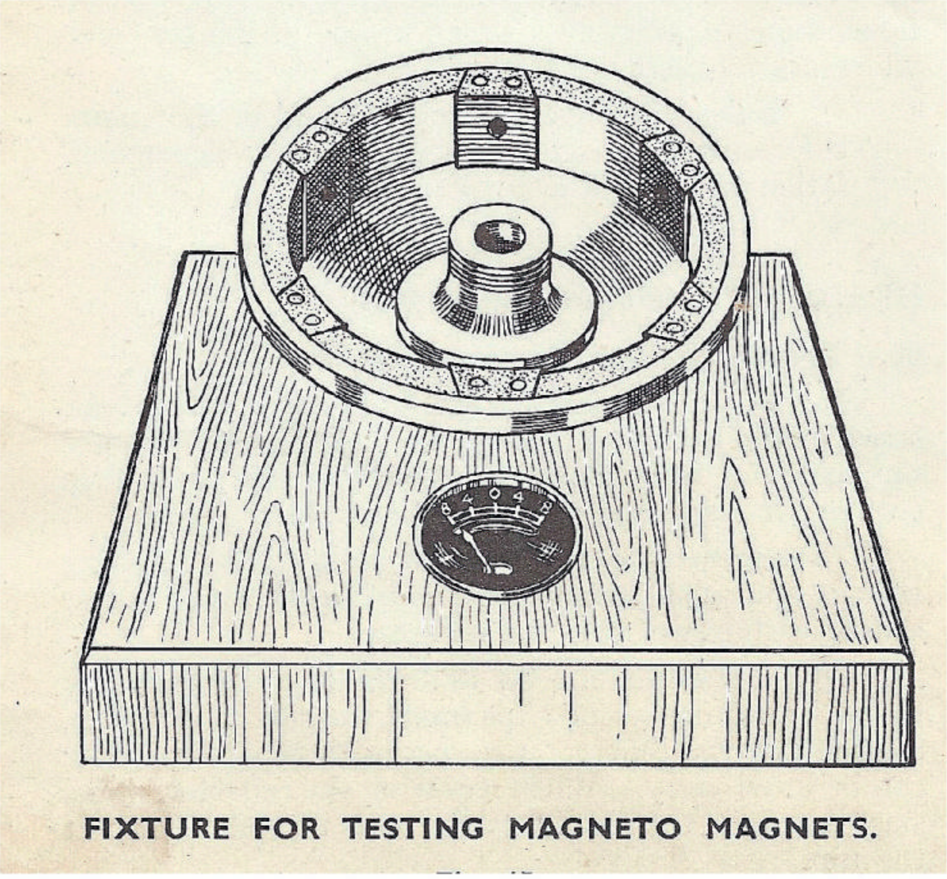
PUB TALK

A gruesome trip to Villiers Services, but with a satisfactory outcome…

Photos by Bonhams Auctioneers, PUB

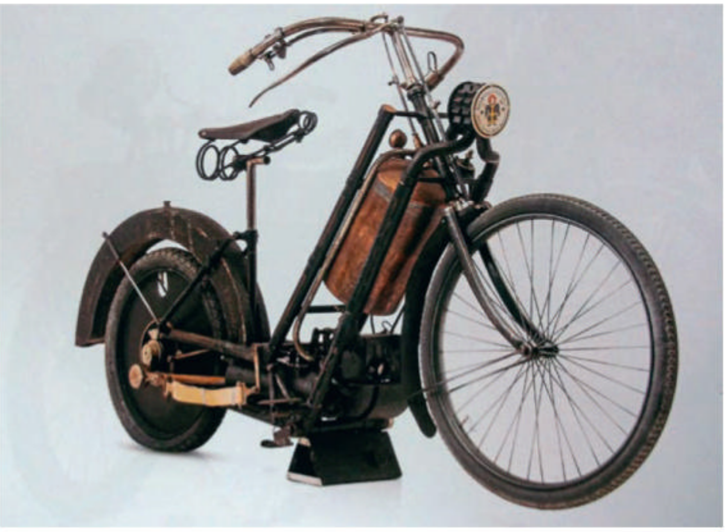


Royal Enfield manual illustration of how to use an ordinary motorcycle ammeter to do comparison tests of flywheel magneto magnetism (sample / known good or before / after tests)

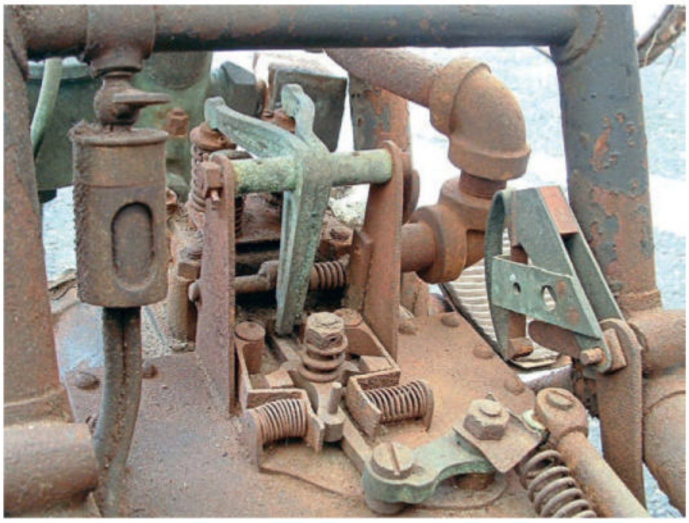
PUBtalk would usually review the odder or more interesting exhibits at the Bristol Show about now. However, the 300+ mile round trip in a day is now beyond her, and last minute hotel rooms all came up around £100. That would still mean either a very early morning, or late evening ride one way, and although the weather forecast was OK, it would be very cold at those times. She wimped out (sorry), but as it is a good show she must look into overnight accommodation earlier next year. However, even with no show to discuss, there has been an auction including interesting lots, notwithstanding that it took place in Paris. No, PUB did not go since the RC expenses (are there such things?) do not run to that, but there is an Internet.

This was the 2023 Bonhams sale of the Peter & Ulrike Bühner museum collection, which provided a contrast to the usual UK auctions with both foreign and some very unusual machines. Top price of the day went to an 1894 Hildebrand & Wolfmüller, reputed to have been run at least once by the collector (€195,500). The copywriter for this item got himself in a knot by introducing a non-existent epicyclic gear into the cam drive, since the Hildebrand & Wolfmüller rear wheel is also its crankshaft and flywheel, yet it is conventional wisdom that a camshaft has to run at half engine speed. But perhaps in the 1880s wisdom had yet to settle 'conventional', and there is no such epicyclic fitted.

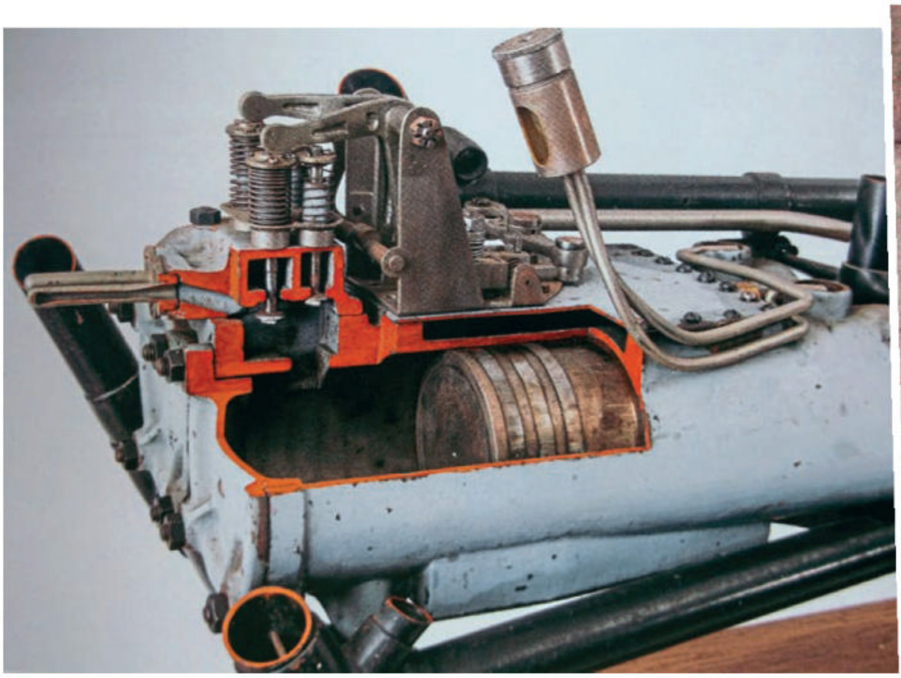
The cam is visibly integral with the wheel / crank / flywheel and so runs at engine speed. No problem though, for although there is a single pushrod, the engine is a twin so one or other cylinder needs its exhaust valve operating every revolution.



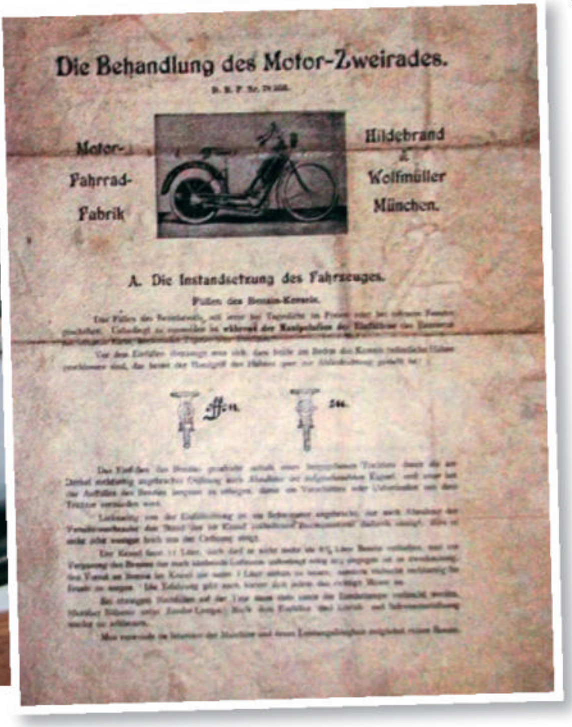
Almost 130 years old, and reputedly still in working order, the Hildebrand and Wolfmüller which was the first series produced petrol powered motorcycle (2-wheel). Photo courtesy of Bonhams



And here is one taken earlier showing a close-up of the 'mechanical distributor' that applies alternate pushes of the single pushrod to the left and right cylinders respectively



An original demonstration engine, believed to be the second produced, and cutaway for advertising purposes. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*



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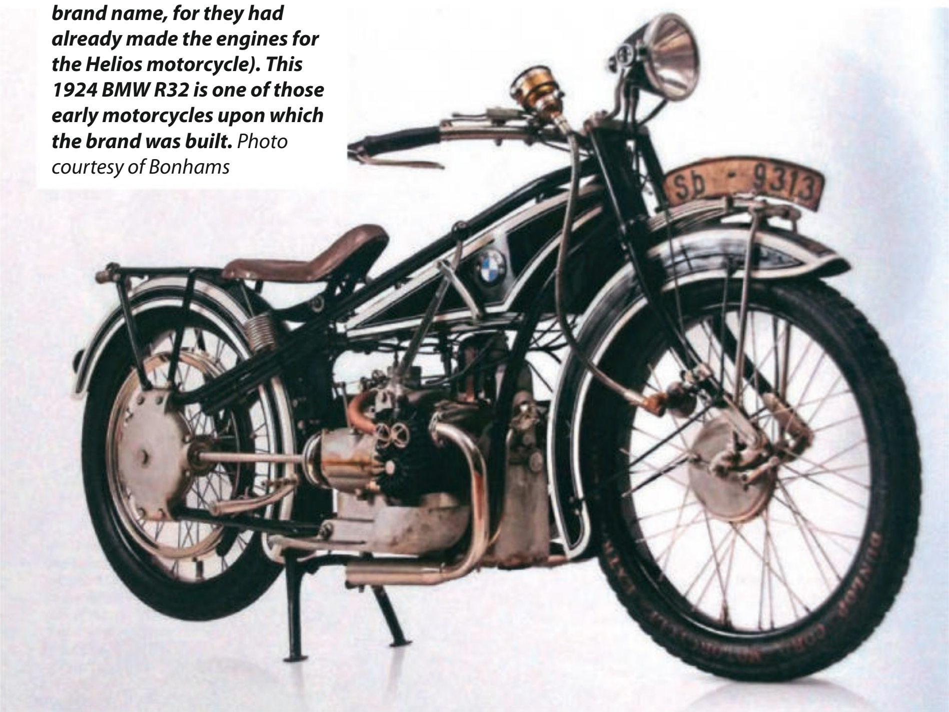
Bidders could not only buy a Hildebrand & Wolfmüller motorcycle, a works cutaway demonstration engine, but also this 4-page leaflet on the machine. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*

Below: 2023 marks the 100th anniversary of BMW's first motorcycle (with their own brand name, for they had already made the engines for the Helios motorcycle). This 1924 BMW R32 is one of those early motorcycles upon which the brand was built. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*

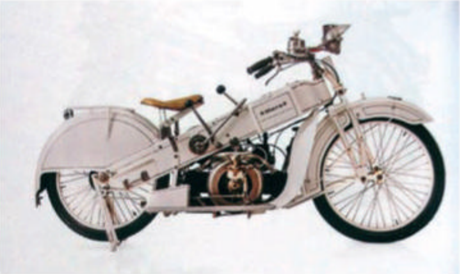


All that was required (and provided) was a 'mechanical distributor' to alternate the rod's push between exhaust valves – the inlets, of course, were automatic at that date.

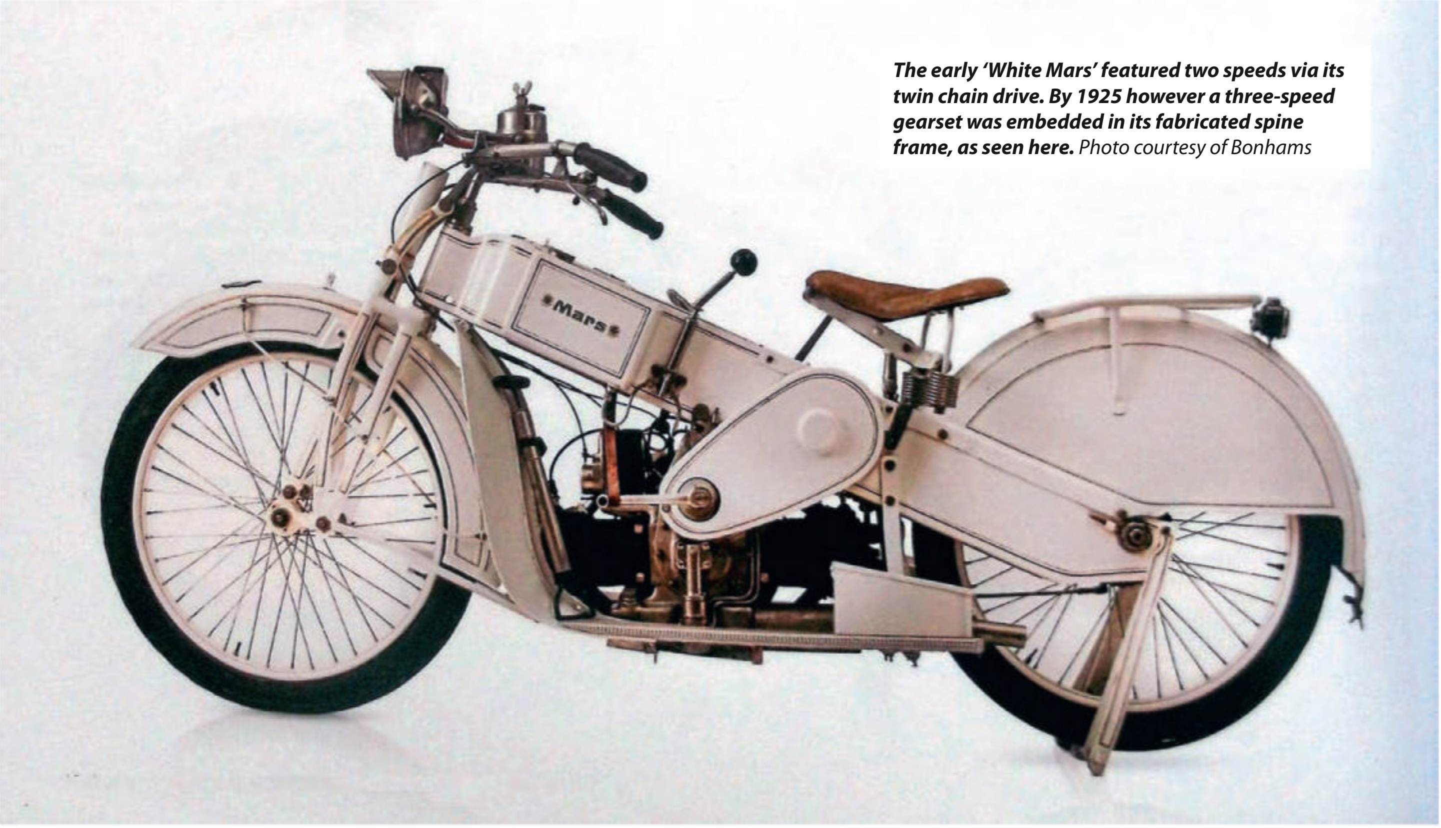
Nor were they the only designers to conceive an engine-speed cam, for Daimler, whose engine was the granddaddy of all our engines, had patented an alternative to the half time pinion and camshaft, consisting of a groove in the timing side flywheel. This groove made two laps of the flywheel, with a crossover rather like those on railway lines in a shunting yard. The follower bridged the crossover so as to alternately take the inner and outer grooves, and thus operated the valve only every second revolution.

Also available at the auction was a cutaway Hildebrand & Wolfmüller engine, reckoned to be No.2, and used for exhibition and advertising (€24,225). There was even an advertising 4-page leaflet too (€446). Although possibly a few thousand machines were made, and they even did well in some early inter-city races, the design was not a success. Starting was by a difficult run-and-jump, and with only two cylinders and little flywheel effect anything approaching smooth running required the rider to tension the rubber straps that roughly filled in the empty return piston strokes. But that tension needed adjusting according to the power setting. So is it not amazing that almost 130 years later, these things still turn up!

Next most expensive machine was a 1924 BMW 494cc R32, their first model and ideal for this year's BMW centenary (€143,750). However, PUB would have been more drawn to the rare 1925 956cc Mars MA20, known as the 'White Mars'. With its fabricated box section spine frame, early models implemented two speeds with twin chains, but this later model featured a 3-speed gear embedded into that spine (€95,450).

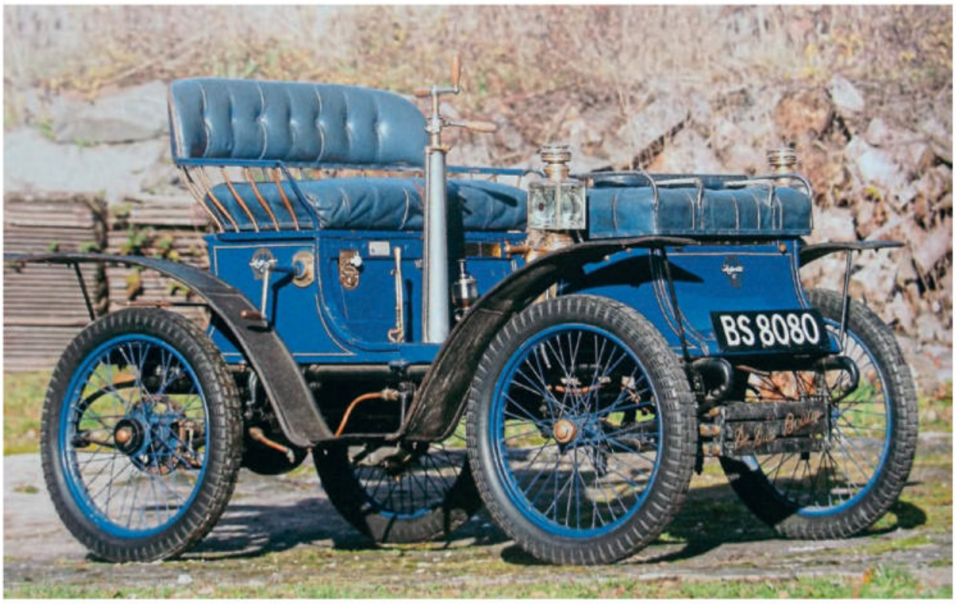


Rare 'White Mars' displaces 956cc with its horizontally opposed sidevalve engine, made for them by Maybach. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*



The early 'White Mars' featured two speeds via its twin chain drive. By 1925 however a three-speed gearset was embedded in its fabricated spine frame, as seen here. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*

Electric start is nothing new, as indicated by this 1936 DKW SB500 two-stroke twin with dynastart under the big, chrome, cover. In fact Indian had tried it 20 years earlier, although with limited success. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*

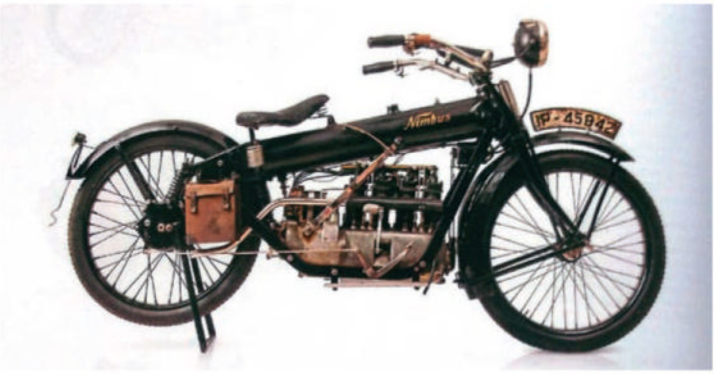


De Dion's first 'car', when moving on from their popular tricycles, was this vis-à-vis design, still with single cylinder engine and very much related to those tricycles, but with two-speed clutched axle. This, however, is a very rare Brooklyn Motorette, license built and sold in the USA. The company seems to have failed in a year, with only a few hundred made, so this is a rare vehicle. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*

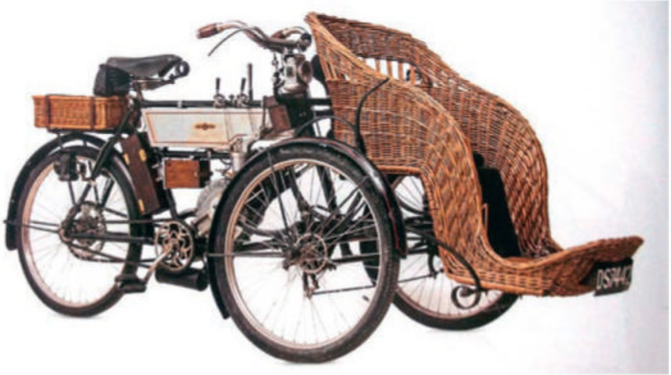
A 1936 DKW SB500 two-stroke twin (€10,120) provided proof that electric starting is nothing new as it featured a dynastart (pre-dated by a couple of decades by Indian, but with less success). American bikes provided other high ticket items, with a 1935 Indian 402 Four (€132,250) and a 1929 Henderson 1301cc KJ four (€73,600). Although a four-wheeler, the c1900 Brooklyn Motorette deserves a mention as it was a rare American license built De Dion 6hp vis-à-vis (€71,300). Denmark was represented by a c1923 746cc Nimbus four 'Stovepipe' model, which, it should be noted, featured swinging fork rear suspension and shaft drive, from the vacuum cleaner maker Fisker & Nielsen.

Naturally there were British bikes too, although the one Vincent was an 'also ran' with its price of €42,250, but PUB could have been tempted by the 1903 Humber air-cooled 2¾ hp 'Olympia tandem forecar' (€46,000). It was pretty close to what Grandad PUB used to take Grandma PUB for rides on, but only a single speeder with pedals – something for a young man perhaps and anyway she has too much junk already.

There were also two examples of the rare Singer (formerly Perks and Birch) 2½ hp wheel, one as the back wheel in a 1901 solo (€25,300), the other as front wheel in a strange 1902 tricycle with reverse facing wicker passenger seat (€36,800). Not only were these strange devices, with their engines inside the aluminium alloy wheels, but they also featured rare low-tension



Made by Danish vacuum cleaner manufacturers Fisker and Nielsen, and known as the 'Stovepipe' model (for obvious reasons), the Nimbus was a very advanced motorcycle, with its 4-cylinder 746cc engine featuring ohv inlet and side exhaust valves, swinging arm rear suspension, and shaft drive, all circa 1923. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*



c1903 Humber 'Olympia tandem' forecar is very similar to granddad PUB's old model, but with only a single speed and pedals – hard work especially with the extra weight of a passenger. Nevertheless, even at this date the Humber featured a spray carburettor (for ordinary petrol rather than requiring higher volatility fuel), and all chain drive. Its origin clearly lies with the Phelon & Moore, from whom the design was licensed. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*

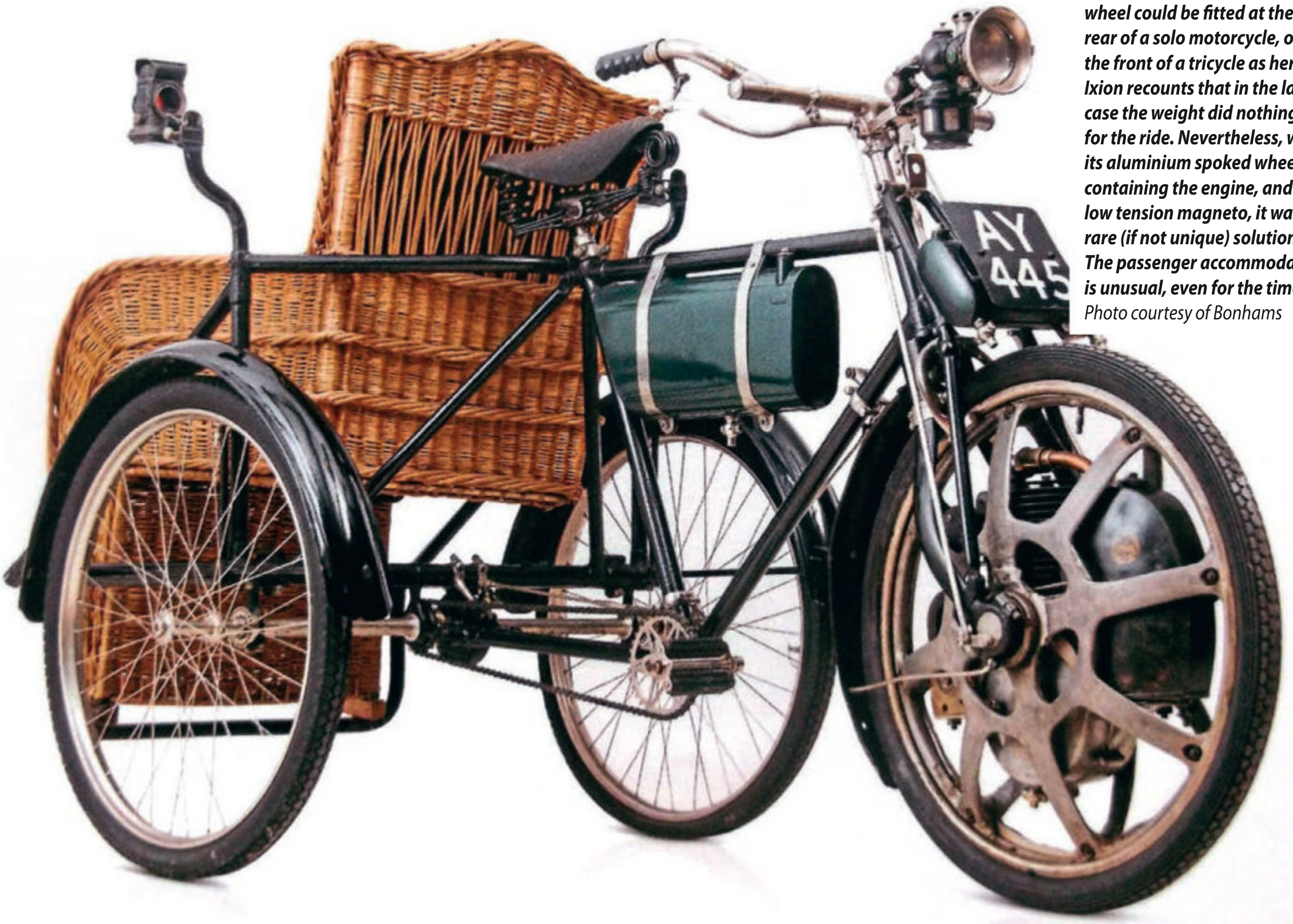
ignition systems with points inside the cylinder.

(At the time of writing the exchange rate was €1 = £0.89).

In The Workshop

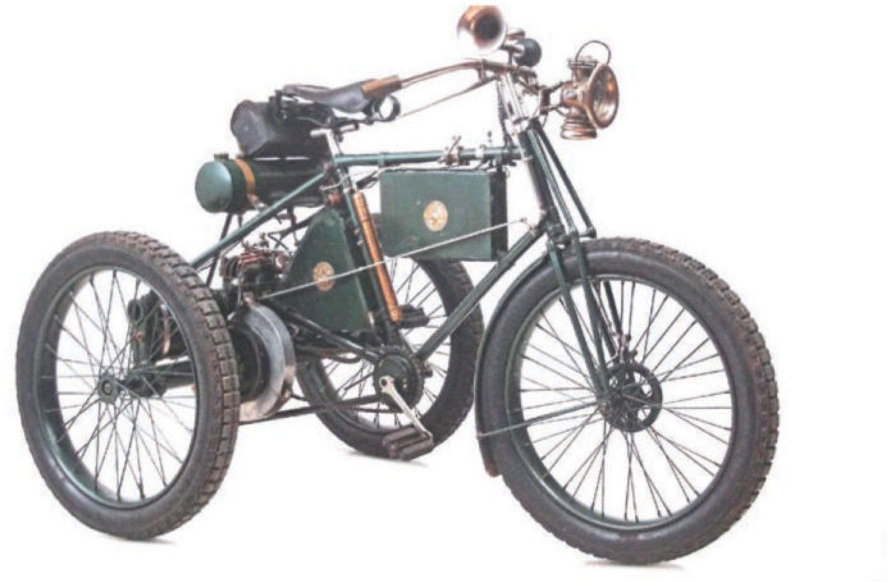
The PWP (pre-war project) is almost finished, even the ignition timing has now been done. But it was cold, so some exploratory work was done on the Flying Flea engine-gear unit in the warm, to see what insides it might have, and what state they might be in (rusted and wrecked being quite possible). Having acquired a flywheel puller (surprisingly PUB did not have one, in spite of having had both an RE125 and a Vincent-NSU previously, both fitted with the same Miller generator), she extracted the flywheel so that the cases could be split.

Actually inside was pretty good, with the crank oily and showing no play (but one main bearing seized), gears all good and only a little excess mainshaft end-float to worry about. Outside was not



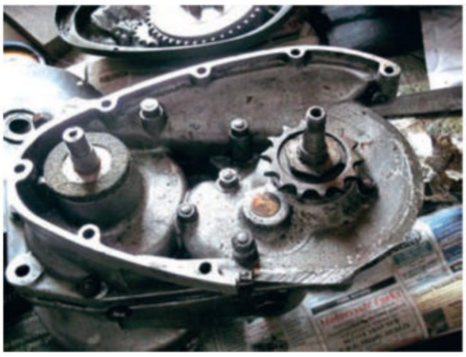
The Singer (Perks & Birch) wheel could be fitted at the rear of a solo motorcycle, or at the front of a tricycle as here. Ixion recounts that in the latter case the weight did nothing for the ride. Nevertheless, with its aluminium spoked wheel, containing the engine, and a low tension magneto, it was a rare (if not unique) solution. The passenger accommodation is unusual, even for the time. *Photo courtesy of Bonhams* so good, with a large chunk taken out of the case where the tin chaincase backplate should bolt, almost certainly by a broken chain. The clutch was completely worn out, the cylinder had a partially broken off spigot, and the head a stripped thread opened out from 14mm to a large BSF size with a big cap head screw blocking it off. Hmmm, a bit of serious work to be done then.

The flywheel would require remagnetising no doubt, having been kicking around for years with no keeper or stator, and there were rear brake shoes in need of relining as mentioned a month or two ago. A visit to Villiers Services could kill two birds with one stone, and as the flywheel is heavy she was aiming to save the postage and packing, since their base is not so far away. So off she went along the M42 to pick up the A38 – but oh dear, the latter was closed. Having tried smaller local roads (also closed) she tried to get back on to M42, thence to the M5, and pick up the A38 a few miles further north. But she should have gone that way first time, because the M42 junction was one of the limited 'one way' junctions that permitting leaving but not rejoining going the same way (look for a different colour on the map which is a warning). Boo.



Although built to a De Dion design, this tricycle was license built by Cudell & Co Motorenfahrzeug of Achen in 1898. The original 1¾ hp engine has apparently been replaced with a 2¼ hp unit (according to the Veteran Car Club). In PUB's opinion, the tyres on this machine are fatter than they would have been in period (26 x 3 in, also known as 700 x 80 mm – and don't do the conversion as it doesn't work out, but it is what they are labelled!). Possibly fitted some years ago when this size was the easiest to find, as well as being a little more comfortable than the narrower originals (€86,250). *Photo courtesy of Bonhams*

This is the start of the Paris-Roubaix race of 1898, when 'motorcycles' had three wheels. Note how skinny are the tyres of these tricycles (compared to those on the auction Cudell). The first tyres used on a car were Michelin, fitted to a Michelin entry in the 1895 Paris-Bordeaux-Paris race, and they were only of 65mm section – about 2½ inches. Early tricycles and motorcycles almost invariably used pneumatics, but usually 2 to 2¼ ins section, or latterly 26 x 2½ x 2¼ which are slightly fatter tyres, but to fit the 2¼ rims (tyres of the period were sized by their outside diameter, as bicycle tyres still are, so larger sections normally fit onto slightly smaller diameter rims)



Oops, not a happy sight to find, a significant chunk of crankcase missing under the final drive sprocket (where the file marks are). There should be two more tapped holes to support the thin tin chaincase backplate. Hmm…

The diversion set off in the opposite direction towards Bromsgrove, but PUB must have missed a couple of turns, finding herself heading first to the roundabouts of Redditch, and subsequently to Kidderminster off the edge of her map and by this time very frustrated. It was just as well that she wasn't on a moped. Finding her own way thereafter to Villiers Services (whose entrance is tricky to find, for even GPS can take one to almost the right place, but the wrong side of a brick wall), PUB missed the obscure turn (off the A4036 close to its A4100 cross roads) and had to carry on until she could manage a U-turn without doing an illegal U-turn. This, unfortunately, arrived at their entrance on the wrong side of a dual carriageway with a central barrier. It should then have been easy to accommodate with a right into the A4100 and a turnaround in the next side road (at that brick wall), except for road works that prevented it. Grrrr!!!!

However, things soon looked up, for the guys volunteered to remagnetise the flywheel on the spot, and to return the relined shoes by post. Hooray, since that avoided most of the return post and packing (and the risk of loss of the rare item). The flywheel wasn't too bad, notwithstanding years of lying about, nevertheless it perked up about 30% they said. PUB asked if they minded her checking. As their answer was OK, she introduced her ordinary Lucas ammeter to the flywheel rim, with a suitable guide / spacer, and turned the flywheel round. The needle deflected to and fro, and sure enough the deflections were maybe 25% more than she had previously seen. The guys at Villiers Services were suitably impressed, because they had acquired a very flash, and expensive, fluxmeter for the task.

However, theirs takes actual measurements, whilst the ammeter trick only permits comparisons, such as before / after or suspect / known good. How does it work? Well, the standard old bike ammeter has a little magnet buried inside, with which the 'moving iron' connected to the needle lines up. As an ammeter, current through a fixed internal coil generates a magnetic field at right angles, so the iron displaces to the combined field maximum. In the flywheel test scenario, the flywheel magnets introduce this distorting magnetism, and show up on the needle reading. Not a clever PUB idea, because she learned it from her old Royal Enfield workshop manual which illustrates such a gadget.

With the important flywheel back in her hands, ready for refitting, the return ride went rather better than the outward one, so it was a successful day after all… RC

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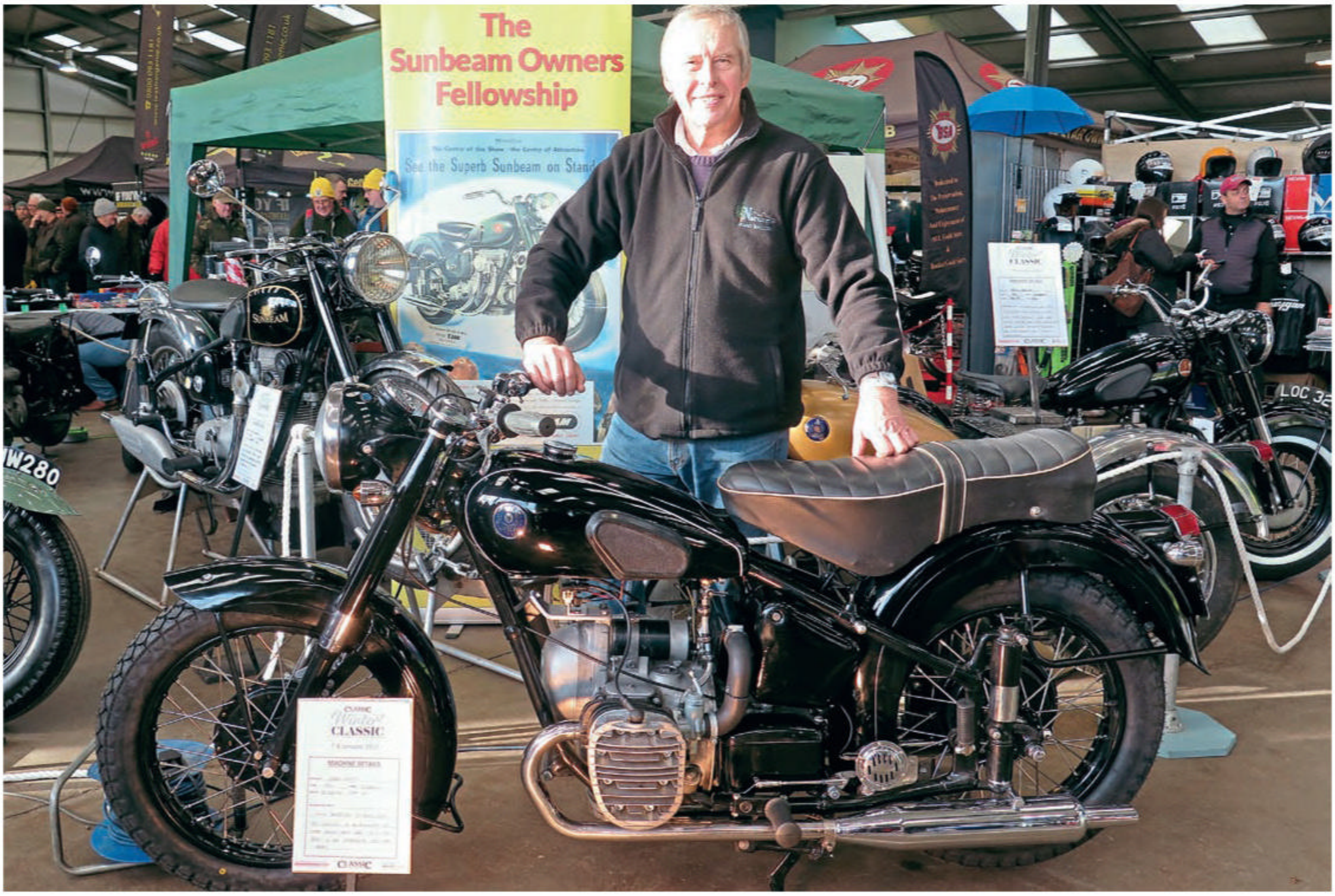
Photos by Ollie Hulme

Ollie's ODDJOBS


The Sunbeam Owners Fellowship
See the Superb Sunbeam on Stand
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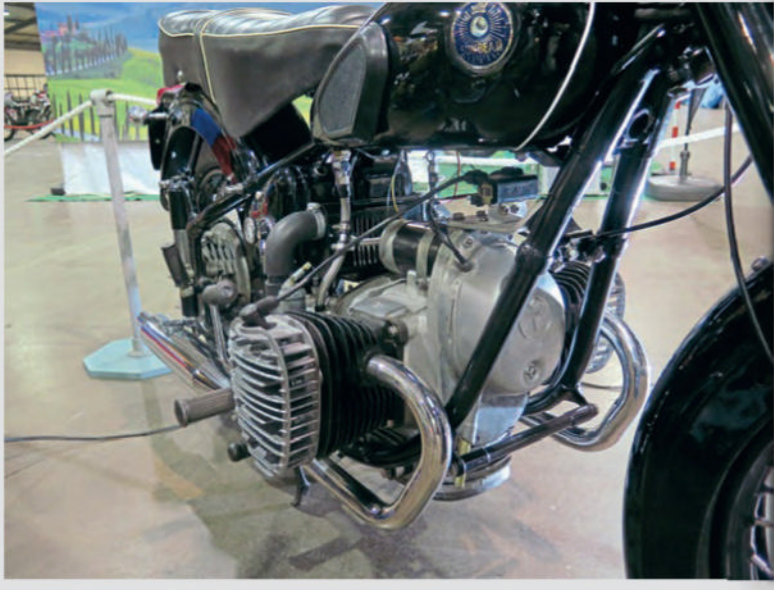
If BSA had adopted a Teutonic-type flat-twin for their post-war Sunbeam project, says Ollie (with a smile), perhaps it might've been something like this…

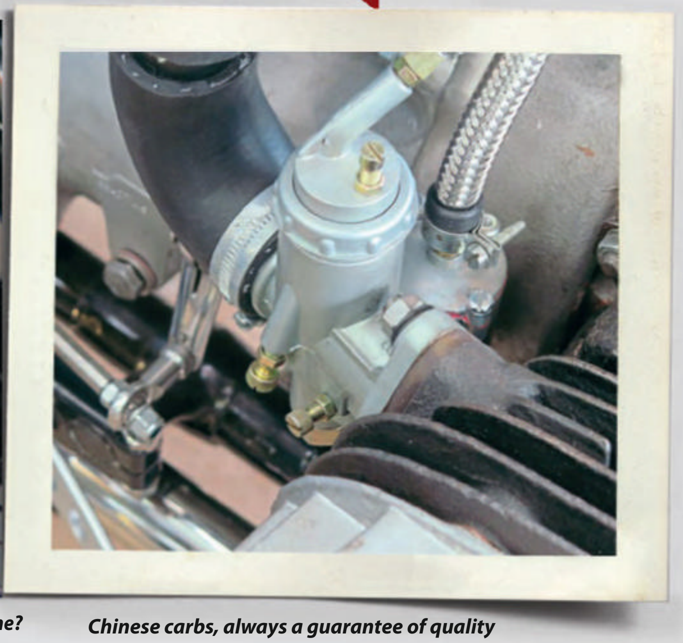
I've always been slightly in awe of people who can take two motorbikes and blend them together to make them into one, probably better, motorbike. There are a few ways of doing this. You can shove a Triumph (or BSA, or Vincent or Panther or Ducati) engine into a Norton featherbed, or do the same thing with a BSA frame, cover it with shiny bits and have yourself the original special. Sometimes, though, there is a level of subtlety involved which creates the motorcyclist double-take. The finished machine looks like it came out of the factory like that. It's an art form. It doesn't happen much with modern bikes these days, but there is a subculture devoted to shoving Suzuki oil-cooled fours into Kawasaki frames.

Members of the Sunbeam Owners' Fellowship seem particularly good at this kind of creativity. I've long been astonished by Daewoo car or Reliant-engined specials, or John Davies' S8 with a handmade crossflow head. And this one, the Sunbeam SV750, is one of those real double-takers.

At the end of WW2, the Allied nations decided that pretty much everything the Germans had designed was fair game for a bit



Would BSA's bright Sunbeam have been more or less popular if fitted with a flat twin engine?



Chinese carbs, always a guarantee of quality

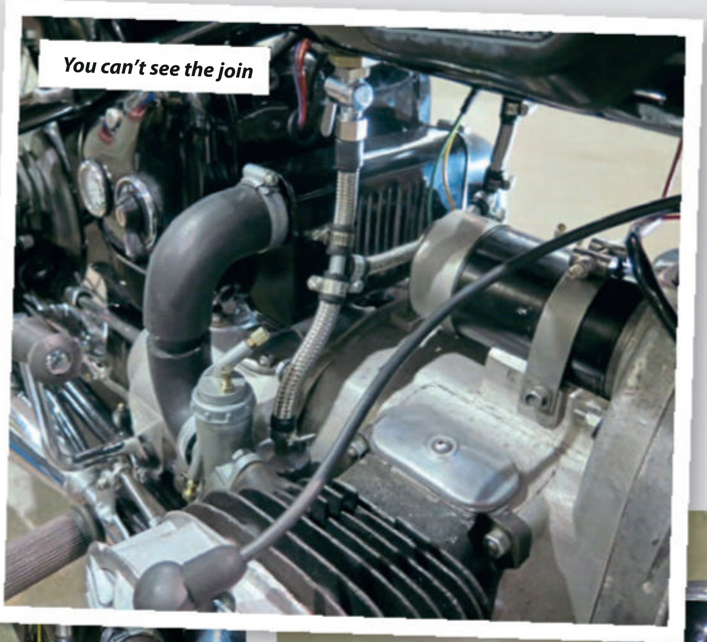
of borrowing. Winner takes all, so to speak, especially when the losers had been largely horrid and copyright tends to expire a bit when that happens.

For reasons best known to themselves, nobody wanted the VW Beetle. Possibly because the Porsche had nicked the design from the Czechs in the first place.

Motorcycles were a different matter. The Allies got their paws on the DKW 2-stroke, as any fule kno, though in fact Royal Enfield had been copying that from 1939 as the Royal Baby / Flying Flea, because a Dutch motorcycle distributor had asked them to, because the Germans wouldn't sell them DKWs as the distributor was Jewish.

And then there were BMW flat twins. The Soviets had been copying the Bavarians' R71 down to the last nut and bolt since 1941. Whether they built it under license or just nicked the design, and ultimately the tooling, is a moot point. They made it in five or possibly six factories in Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere for decades as the M72. The Americans fancied a crack at the BMW flat twins too, which were, pre-war, a long way ahead of what other countries were knocking out, with plunger frames, telescopic forks and what-not. Harley-Davidson had a go at selling an R71 clone to the US Army.

The British were more wary. BSA looked at the BMWs but decided that given that the Germans had bombed Coventry to oblivion, the idea of an obviously German motorbike chugging around the West Midlands might not be regarded as universally popular, and there may have been raised eyebrows, tea being spilled and drive-by tuttings. BSA therefore took the R71 concept and stuck an inline ➤



You can't see the join

750cc of pure Ukrainian muscle

That classic British cockpit. Apart from the indicators…

500cc ohc twin of their own design in it, modified the shaft so it used a worm drive rather than a gear, called it the Sunbeam S7 and nobody mentioned BMW again. Ever.

Peter Knight of the Sunbeam Owners' Fellowship knows the story and decided to recreate what might have happened if BSA/ Sunbeam had decided to go down the same route as the Soviets. He showed the result, the Sunbeam SV750 at the Newark show. To create the SV750 he got his hands on a basketcase 1956 Sunbeam S8 and a 750cc Soviet-era sidevalve M72 engine and set to work.

The sidevalve engine in the SV750 was made in Kyiv and is now running, though it wasn't an easy task. Chinese carbs were used which were copies of the original Soviet-era copies of the original BMW carbs. Look at pictures of an R71 and you can see they are nearly identical. But the Chinese carbs had a 'quality which left a lot to be desired' and it took cannibalising two sets of carbs to get them to balance. However, at £55 a pair, it was a lot cheaper than the alternative option of using a pair of Amal Concentrics. 'You get what you pay for,' says Peter. Now, with the carbs balanced, Peter says the bike pulls like a train with loads of torque.

Getting that torque to the worm drive and thence to the back wheel uses an S8 gearbox, mated to the Cossack engine. This brought challenges of its own, as both the Cossack engine and the Sunbeam gearbox have their own bell housing, so Peter cut the one off the Sunbeam 'box with an angle grinder. Then, to mate the two ends together, he made up an adaptor plate pattern out of MDF, took it to a nearby laser cutter and got them to make one from a 10mm thick piece of stainless steel. Stainless was used for longevity.

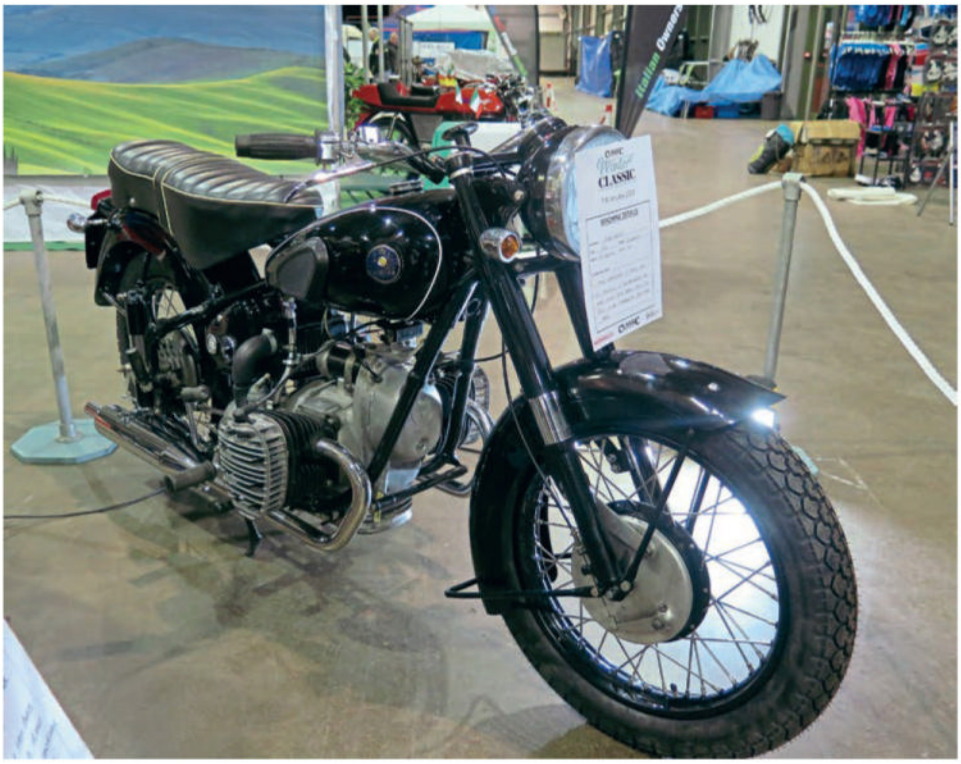
As the mounting holes were different on the engine and gearbox, he had one set of mounting holes countersunk to mount the plate to the engine, and the gearbox was bolted on through to the plate with 12mmm bolts into threads cut in the plate.

The key to the build was that the shaft on the gearbox and the clutch on the engine were, by a mysterious coincidence, of exactly the same dimensions. This just happened to coincide with a Borg & Beck shaft, which he could use as an alignment tool.

The whole engine unit is rubber mounted, and a single bronze shaft that runs through the bottom of the engine casings is mounted in handmade stainless steel and rubber bushes. All of this means the engine can rock backwards and forwards but barely moves side to side, and the bike is incredibly smooth, with virtually no vibration coming through footrests or handlebars. There's a BSA Gold Star front brake on there too, as Peter didn't fancy the chances of the feeble 7-inch BSA / Sunbeam original bringing the extra weight of the big iron-barrelled engine to a halt.

To stop him burning his feet on the cylinder heads, Peter made four-inch rearsets. The seat was picked up a Newark autojumble, possibly intended for an NSU Max or a BMW R27, and there is now a tooltray from a BMW R80RT underneath it to fill the gap. He's converted the electrical system to 12V with a regulator from AO Services, there's a Ukrainian electronic ignition system and the standard S8 loom.

If you want to take a closer look at it, the Sunbeam SV750 is likely to be at the April Stafford show. And there might be another Sunbeam flat twin, with an 850cc Gnome et Rhone engine in it, built by John Davies. Can't wait!



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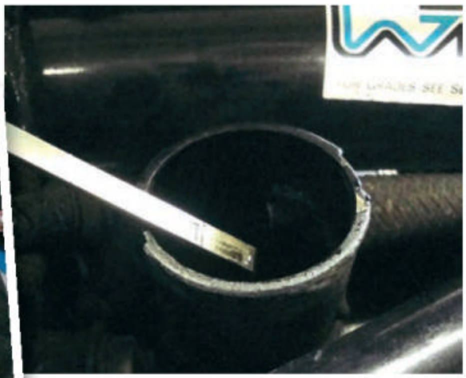
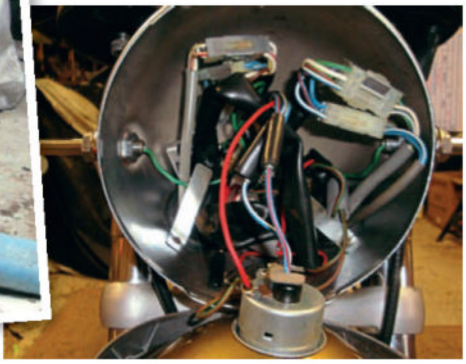
TALES FROM THE SHED

It's been nothing but Norton for quite a while now. Frank reports progress. We'll see. We'll believe it when we see it…

The starter motor is certainly a Prestolite original, but appears to boast an unexpected level of enthusiasm



Not a lot of oil in here. Is it all in the crankcases or is it merely absent?



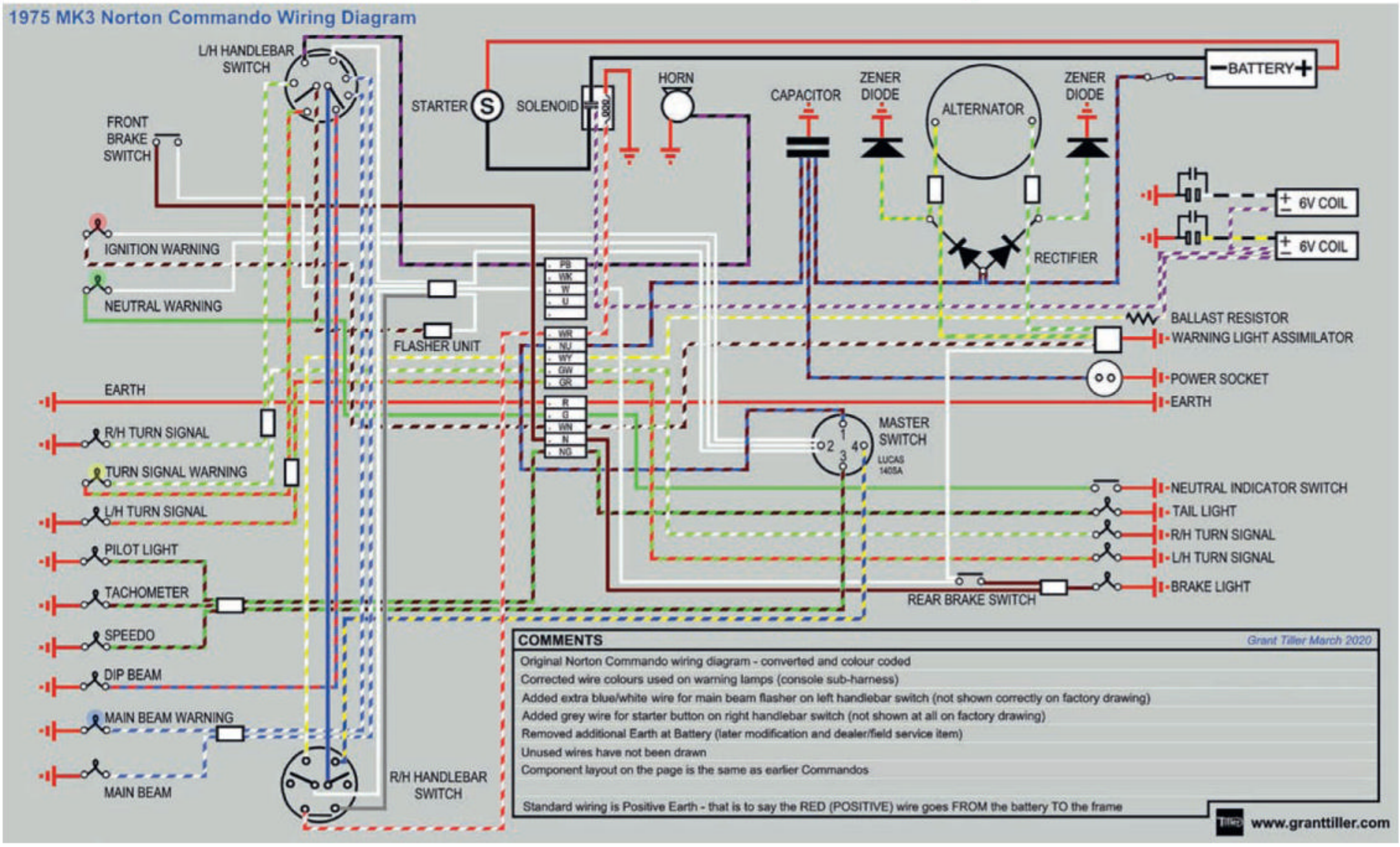
Inside the headlamp. It's all in remarkably good condition and appears to have been untouched since it left the factory in 1975. Mostly, works, too. Observe the almost modern connector blocks.

So! Cast your mind back to the dark days of only last month. The mighty American Commando was sitting pretty on the bench. It has a huge new battery and a mostly dimensionally correct replica ignition / lighting switch – which works! As do most of the rest of the LT (low tension, in case you were asleep during primary school fizzix) circuits, including – wonder of wonders – the starter motor. I'm still utterly astounded that a 1975 Prestolite starter motor spins with enough energy to rotate itself, never mind a Commando engine, but it does. Honest. OK, so the spark plugs were out at the time, but the motor whizzes the engine over easily, revealing that both the oil pump and crankcase breathing system work. The latter became obvious when I removed the oil tank cap and a filthy, thick black jet of gloop shot across the space between the Norton and me. Fortunately my pullover stopped most of it. Sigh…

A healthy oil pump does not a running engine make, sadly, so it was back to my not entirely favourite way of spending Shed time: searching for the spark.

As with every single non-running motorcycle I've acquired down the years (and there have been big lots of them), I attempt to discover why the previous owner(s) failed to get it going, and what stopped it going in the first place. Back in the cold, dark past, when old bikes were just old bikes and their main attraction was their relative worthlessness, I would buy non-running machines, preferably AMC twins, and attempt to get them running. Back in 1975 or so, a non-running Matchless G9 was almost worthless, and the reason for their static demeanour was almost always a duff magneto. Mr Lucas's K2F often rewarded a couple decades of neglect by becoming very unreliable, and in 1976 there were almost no spares anywhere – unless you were a member of the owners' club (I was) and had a bunch of buddies to help (I did).

Probably half of the duff magnetos would spark up with a little cleaning of the slip ring, new carbon brushes for the pick-ups and possibly better pick-ups – which often grew carbon 'tracks' which allowed the spark to


1975 MK3 Norton Commando Wiring Diagram
L/H HANDLEBAR SWITCH
FRONT BRAKE SWITCH
IGNITION WARNING
NEUTRAL WARNING
EARTH
R/H TURN SIGNAL
TURN SIGNAL WARNING
L/H TURN SIGNAL
PILOT LIGHT
TACHOMETER
SPEEDO
DIP BEAM
MAIN BEAM WARNING
MAIN BEAM
R/H HANDLEBAR SWITCH
STARTER
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PB
WK
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TAIL LIGHT
R/H TURN SIGNAL
L/H TURN SIGNAL
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COMMENTS

Original Norton Commando wiring diagram - converted and colour coded
Corrected wire colours used on warning lamps (console sub-harness)
Added extra blue/white wire for main beam flasher on left handlebar switch (not shown correctly on factory drawing)
Added grey wire for starter button on right handlebar switch (not shown at all on factory drawing)
Removed additional Earth at Battery (later modification and dealer/field service item)
Unused wires have not been drawn
Component layout on the page is the same as earlier Commandos

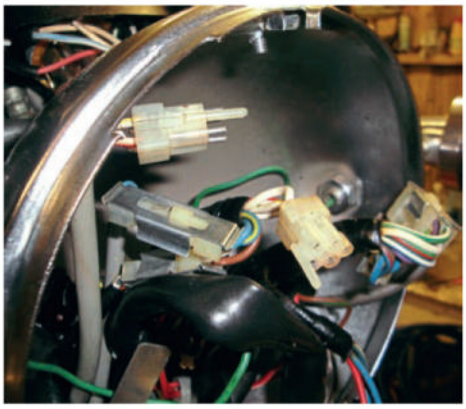
Standard wiring is Positive Earth - that is to say the RED (POSITIVE) wire goes FROM the battery TO the frame

Thanks to Grant Tiller for his easy-read wiring diagram

short to earth with remarkable and mystifying ease. If all else failed, which was less frequent than you might think, then it was another trip to the breaker to dig out a twin distributor, a coil and an ignition switch. There were quite a few AMC twins with coil ignition, and the dizzies were always salvageable.

The Mk3 Norton Commando does not have a magneto…

So it was with a sense of dim inevitability that I set about my spark hunting process. I've done this lots and lots, and am of course no better at it now than I was then. Time to remove the headlamp from its shell and do a little stuff with the elderly meter. And to gaze once more upon Grant Tiller's easy-read wiring diagram. The problem was going to be somewhere between the master switch and the sparky assembly, plainly. The connector inside the headlamp shell (and a strange sort of connector it is too – multi-pin instead of bullets) which sends electrical stuff to the right-hand handlebar switch was fine and connected – and looks brand new, in fact. And the switch cluster itself was receiving and distributing power: the headlamp switch in the cluster worked fine, as did the starter motor, which just left – oh no – the kill switch. As there's a lead to the switch and a lead from the switch inside that nice connector, it was simple to detect that the kill switch itself was dead. Pause for admiration of a small irony. Further pause to locate and order a new switch cluster for the handlebar.



The two grey leads to the left are from the righthand switch cluster, and the separated halves of the neat multi-pin connector make checking for continuity easy enough

Which of course duly arrived but appeared to be a Triumph unit, which is different and does not quite fit the front brake master cylinder assembly of the Norton. It also requires a new twisty bit to operate the throttle cable – which it arrived with, to be fair. In any case, the handlebar assembly needed to come apart. Easy enough. Except…

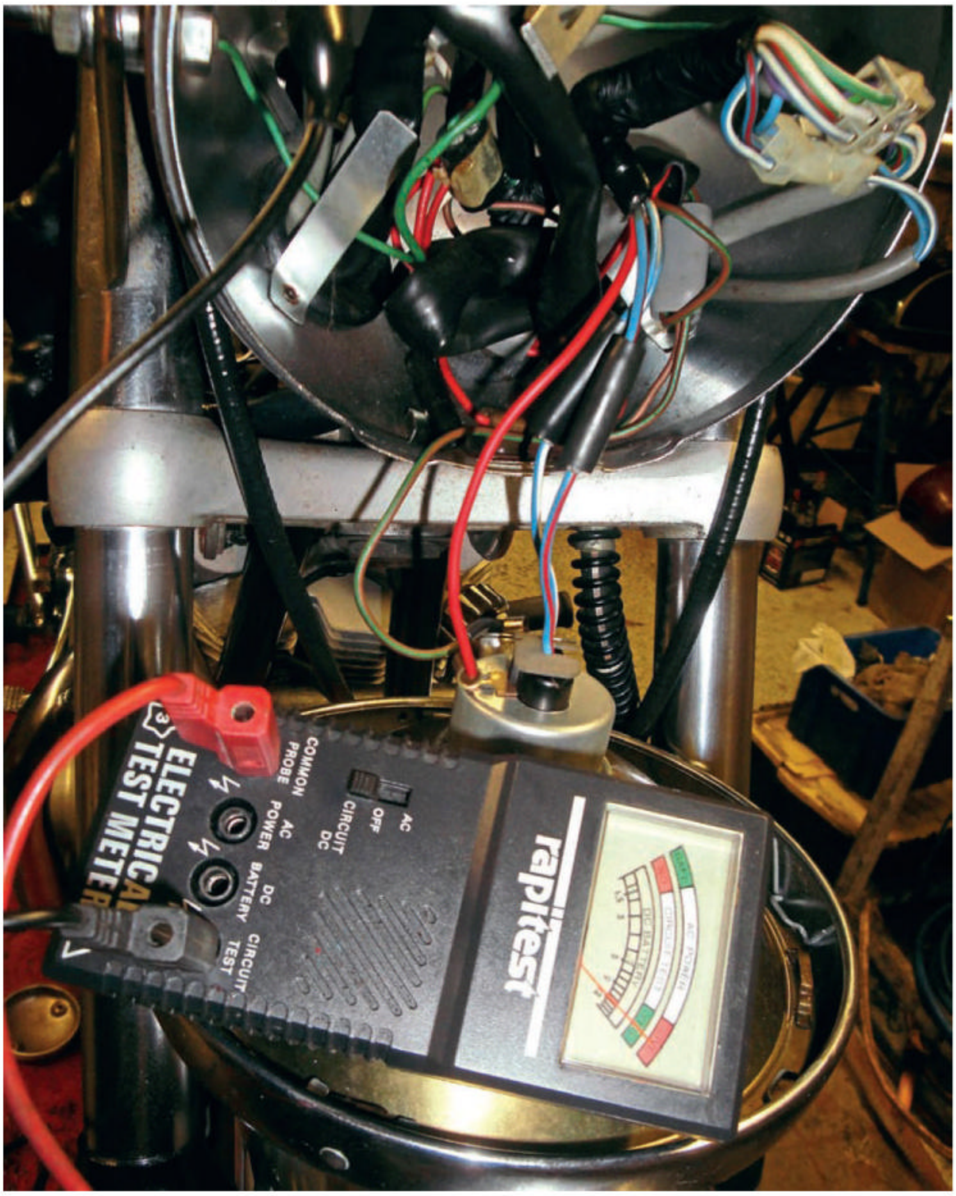
Except that of course all the cross-head screws were butchered. This was the first sign of actual butchery on the bike. The master cylinder had also plainly been leaking at some point, which had stripped the paint from the switch block and indeed from some areas of the fuel tank. Aha! Reasons for the low mileage and why the Norton had been taken off the road, then. I managed to separate the master cylinder from the electrical switch block, which actually does the handlebar-gripping thing.

The next snag to rear its ugliness was the cheery discovery that the screws which hold the switch cluster to the handlebar were not only completely butchered, but were also seized solid. Drilling them out is a skill requiring greater dexterity (and better eyesight, to be honest) than I possess, so I resorted to chemical bodgery of my own. Switch cleaner sprayed into the switch cluster itself and gentle manipulation of the kill switch button. Gently sliding the switch between its two 'off' positions and the single 'on' point in the middle. And of course I scoured the webs of the world looking for a decent used item – there were none.

The gentle, careful switch operation, keeping an eye on the meter to see whether its needle would bound around when the LT circuit was restored, is surprisingly restful. I can recommend it. I'd already talked with Noble Kenny at Ace Mosickles, and he was entirely positive that removing and rethreading the switch was the work of mere seconds. For him, of course. But that was a defeat I didn't want to admit to so soon into my life with the US Commando.

And then – continuity! Power returned. I caried on applying switch cleaner (which does at least smell nice) and sliding the switch until the contact point within was stable enough for me to go looking for power at… the points! At this point (couldn't resist – sorry) I was genuinely surprised when the meter

➤



Lovely meter proudly displays a completed circuit. Power flows again through the kill switch

revealed that power was present! Hurrah. And then…

And then suddenly it wasn't. No power again. Boo.

This is really annoying. The only reason a power feed can be intermittent is a loose connection somewhere. But where? So it was back out with the meter, carefully leaving the kill switch entirely alone and working through the connectors, many of which are a little tired, but only a couple of them have obviously been manipulated in the past. I leaned on Andover Norton's excellent online ordering system and amazingly high levels of spares availability (they quote 95%, which is certainly better than when I first ran a Commando in the late 1970s) to treat the bike to all the major components in the LT side of things. The logic here was that although the connector on the wiring harness side of a joint rarely gives trouble, the same cannot be said of all the male connectors on, for example, the coils, the ballast resistor, the capacitors.

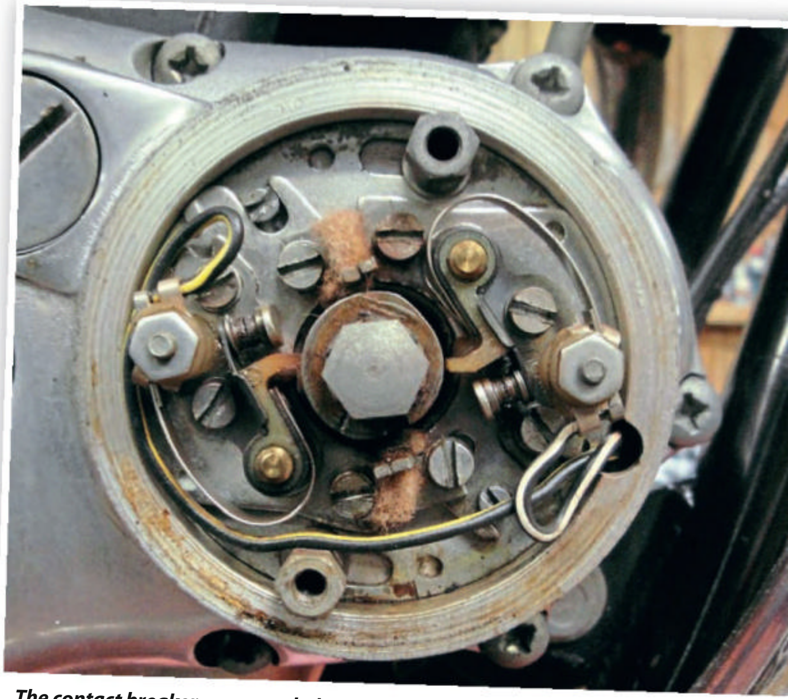
Then the power to the points came back. I have no idea why. I'd worked my way through most of the connectors – remember that a Mk3 Commando has an 'ignition sub-harness' – with no success, and went back to the house to do something else. When I returned the following afternoon… everything worked.

Power is delivered to the twin sets of contact breakers by two leads – one to each set. The spark is generated by the separation of the two contacts in each set. The left-side contact breakers (looking at the assembly in the usual way) were live, and although the contacts themselves were in a grim state, everything worked as it should. The other side did nothing. It was a tiny bit puzzling, but eventually I got a spark out of them, so happiness ruled for a bit.

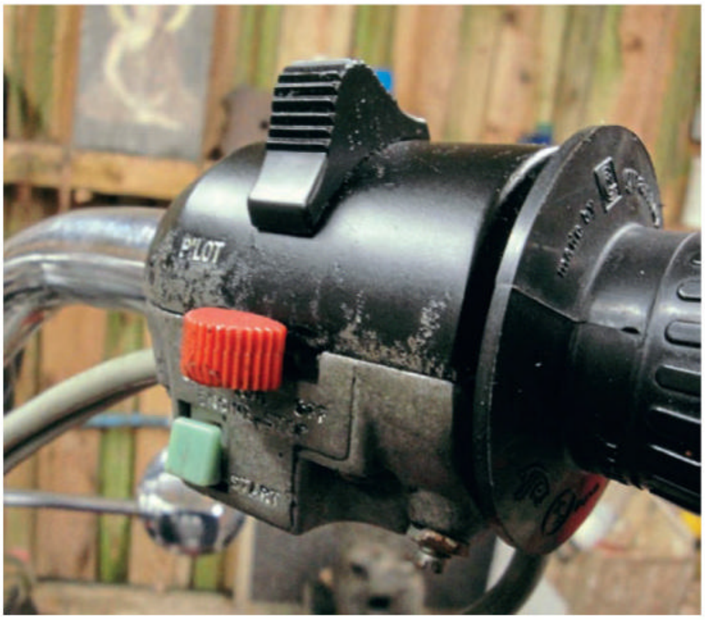
At this point, everyone on the planet was advising me to fit a Pazon or a Tri-Spark ignition system and ditch those tired old contact breakers. This is indeed the conventional wisdom. However, I've never really liked solid-state stuff much. I bought two very cheap non-running Commandos back in the long-ago 70s and fixed them both by replacing the defunct Boyer ignitions with NOS contact breaker sets bought at those long-ago Bolton autojumbles. In both cases the failure was to the soldering on the back of the circular circuit board. And although my last, lovely, Mk3 ran a Pazon and it was fine, I decided to stick with the points on this one. There's no real reason…

So off I went again into the ethers to get two new contact breaker sets. These are amusing, in that they claim to be Lucas, and indeed arrive in an envelope with the contacts breakers themselves in a plastic bag and with a folded flat, plainly never used little cardboard box boasting proud Lucas labelling. The contact sets are in fact produced by Daiichi in Japan, which is not entirely good old Joe Lucas. They probably work better.

Even more amusement is provided by the actual genuine Mk3 Commando factory workshop manual, which illustrates the points adjustment section with a diagram of an earlier set-up – and with instructions to match the diagram, not an actual Mk3. Chucklesome stuff.



The contact breakers, as revealed. Pretty mucky, but they should have power. At this point (!), they do not



It is plain that fluid from the front brake master cylinder has been spilled on the switch cluster at some point. Hated kill switch caused a problem, not least because the screws which would allow access to its internals were mullered

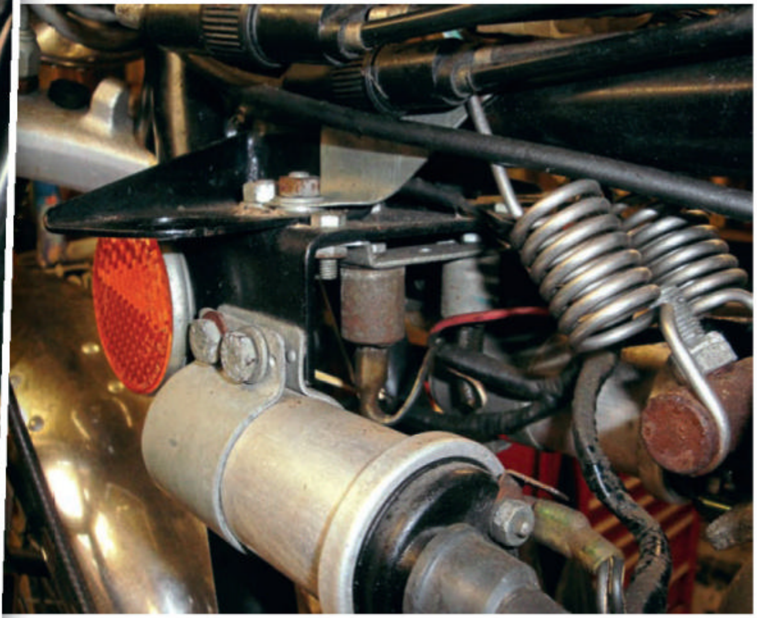
However, adjusting the points is easy enough – use a bright light and (in my case) reading glasses. And check that the auto-advance unit works while you're at it. This one was fine.

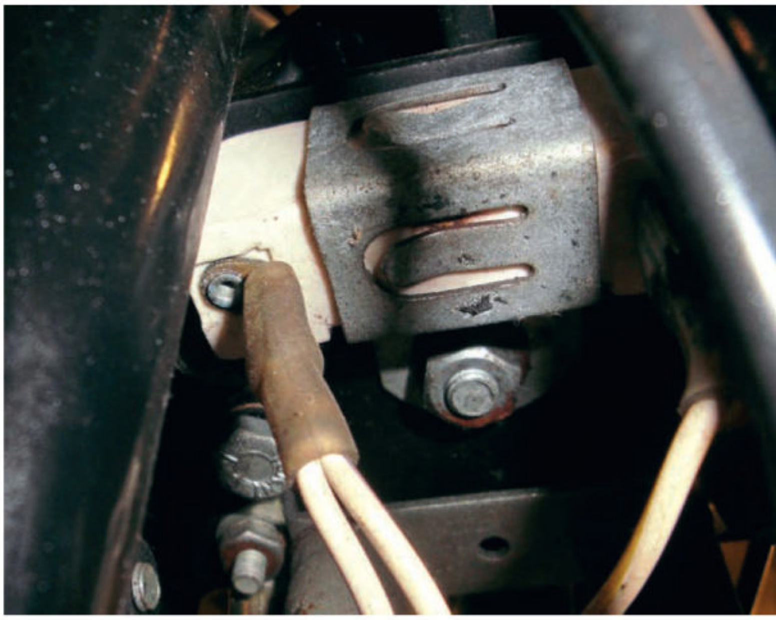
The original points were a right mess, filthy, pitted and burned. They would most likely have worked fine after a little cleaning, but I'd already bought replacements. As mentioned earlier, these were very neat and even came with those little felt lubricating wicks, which everyone over-oils, which results in the contact breaker faces getting covered in sticky doo-dah. And everything looked good. Time to connect the battery again (it is impossible to be over-cautious when fiddling with old electrical wiring) and switch on; time to confirm that there was a clean break at the contacts. My cheap analogue meter is great for this.

The left set of points opened and closed cleanly, and the meter needle's little dance was brisk. Hurrah.

The right set of points opened and closed cleanly and the needle stayed on open circuit, which suggested that although the contacts had broken their circuit current was still flowing freely between them. This is very unlikely. I peered and peered, but the points appeared to have separated fine. I stuck a thin piece of plastic between them to confirm that the circuit was indeed broken. It made no difference. I took a couple of high-res photos of the points assembly and returned to the house for the evening. Time to sink a beer and gaze in wonder at the computer screen where I could study hugely enlarged pics of the points. Doesn't everyone spend quiet domestic evenings like this?

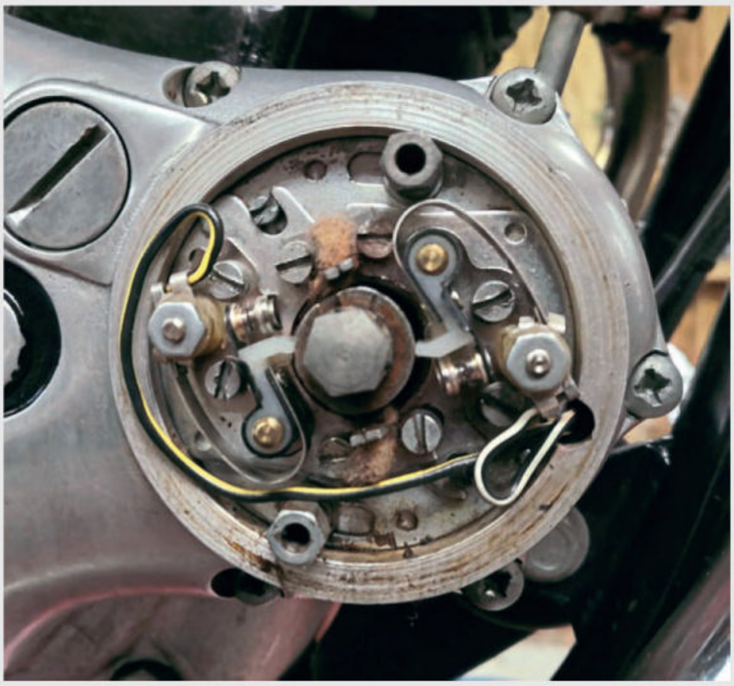
And so it was, gentle reader, that I returned to The Shed a few days later (I don't actually spend as much time in there as you probably imagine, due to work and stuff) and rigged up a spotlight so I could study the points assembly better. The meter confirmed the open circuit, so it hadn't gone away in my absence, sadly, but the bright light (and reading glasses) confirmed the probable cause revealed by those great big computer images. The right-hand contact breaker's steel spring seemed to be making contact with the head of one of the various screws which hold the backplate assembly together. It's not easy to be sure while looking at a two-dimensional image. But, remarkably, it did appear likely. So I removed the lovely new contact breaker set and replaced the tired ➤



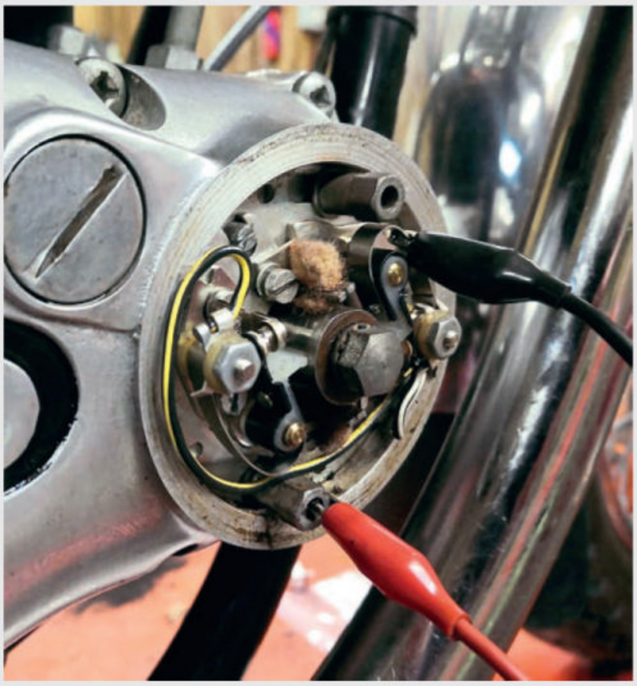


Chasing circuits involves lots of prodding at lots of connectors and terminals with the probes of the trusty meter. There's a neat pack holding the capacitors (which should have a rubber cover) while the ballast resistor lives in front and below. Access can be a challenge

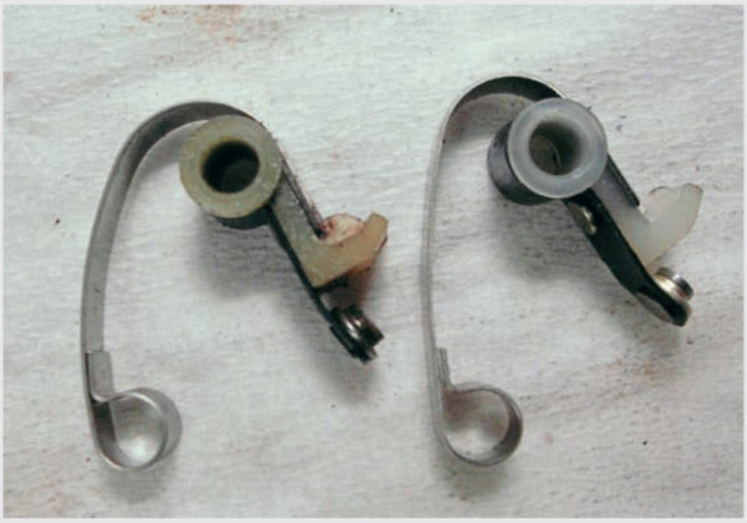
LOOKING FOR THE LEAK



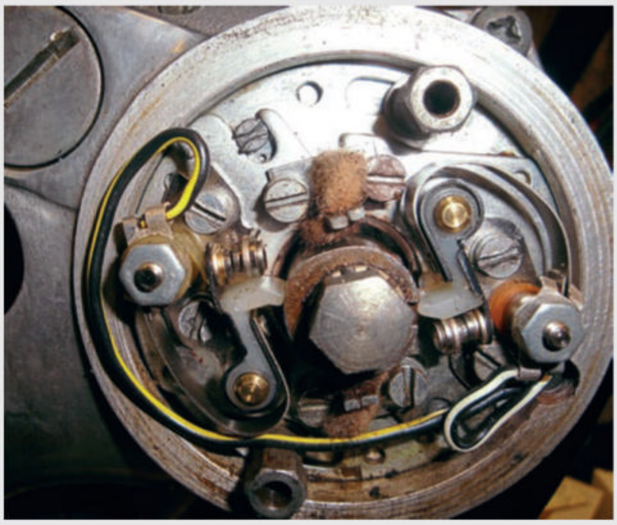
Enlarging this image about 10x revealed that the righthand spring appeared to be touching a baseplate screwhead



The meter confirmed the contact and resulting short



The reason: check out the spring lengths. New part is on the right



Fixed…

original. Which worked perfectly.

Do you also hate wasting money? The short answer appeared to be simple, so I confidently expected the worst. I applied brute force to the new contact set's spring, and simply bent it sufficiently to stop it touching the screw head. Would this simple act of applied violence work? Would I have a clean break on both sets of points?

Yes and indeed yes. How remarkable. Time to stick a pair of new plugs into the HT lead caps to check that they sparked. They did not. Some things in this life are predictable. And I had indeed predicted this very failure and acquired a pair of new made-up leads from Andover Norton. These are not very difficult to fit. The spark plugs sparked. Both of them. And reliably.

This was a ridiculously tense moment. How many old bike fiddlers could resist what could happen next? But I did try. I reminded myself that although I'd acquired new petrol pipes and new taps to cope with modern E10 fuels, I had not fitted them. Although the fuel tank's interior is only a little rusty and dusty, I had intended to clean it out. Compromise, then. Always a good thing. Almost always.

The new fuel taps – brass lever spindles rather than Nylon; big filters – went into their new homes in the base of the tank. A pair of washers (I hesitate to apply the word 'Dowty') sealed them. Next, a half-gallon of fuel into the tank and slosh it all around like a fool, then drain it again through a fine filter to see what came out. The filter stayed clean.

I am running out of excuses.

Rest the tank on its rubbers and connect up the 1975 plastic fuel pipes. Open the taps. Observe the fuel flowing steadily until quite suddenly it stopped, with a neat meniscus just below each tap. The float needles work, then. Turn on the ignition, which is not easy with fingers crossed. Ease the engine over compression and… pause. Add a litre of oil to the seemingly empty tank, just in case the engine isn't actually full of old lube.

Apply full choke and a solid kick. The left-side silencer emits a polite cough. Stand back in amazement. Being careful to touch nothing else, apply a second kick. The right side silencer coughs and emits a perfect smoke ring. I take this as A Sign. And I press the starter button…

Even before the engine has turned over, it is running. Running steadily on both cylinders. I cannot believe it. I may have become a teeny little bit emotional at this point. The rev counter works, which is also a small surprise. Leaving the engine ticking over – which is a little amazing, given the length of time since it last ran – it's a simple matter of whipping off the oil filler cap and observing with wonder that a steady stream of old oil is returning. As I watch, golden threads of clean oil appear mingled with the mucky old stuff, and after only a minute or several the familiar steady spurt of oil replaces the continuous stream.

Rowena appears in the doorway, and stands open-mouthed. I beam, like I had expected this all the time. I ooze with entirely fictitious confidence. The steady stream of thin smoke / vapour from both peashooter silencers clears, and as the tickover is speeding up, I open the choke and give the throttle a twist. The engine rewards me by sounding delightful and the tickover drops back, as it should. Hardly any mechanical noise and no smoke nor leaks. Something must be wrong, surely?

Time to kill the engine (using the ignition switch, not the kill switch) and to see whether it will start again.

It does. Just like that. Settles down to a steady 1000rpm tickover. Time for a glass of refreshment, I do believe… RC

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